

Lam Son 719 / Dewey Canyon II

Operation Lam Son 719- Feb 8th to the costly withdrawals on Mar 20th 1971 .Lam Son 719 was a major operation of the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam, ARVN, into Laos from 30 Jan - 24 Mar 1971. U.S provided all the aviation assets for this operation with costly withdrawals on Mar 20th 1971

**This data is as it was in 1994 and needs update.
Contact Mike Sloniker with updates and he will put them in the document.
Sloniker is working towards accompanying the text with pictures, actual
videos and the actual audio tapes on a CD ROM as a finished product.**

It is a VHPA custom to present at least one major history in the annual Membership Directory and to relate the cover theme to the history section. In 1992 the theme was the 7/17th Air Cav Squadron, in 1993 it was DUSTOFF and MEDEVAC, and for 1994 it is DEWEY CANYON II / LAM SON 719. This is the VHPA's first attempt to document a major operation. LAM SON 719 was certainly major in every way. It started in late January, 1971 and was completed by early April. During this operation the Army lost at least 106 helicopters and the Marines lost two of their big Sea Stallions.

The goal of the history section in any VHPA Membership Directory is not to write the definitive work on the subject, but to provide a format for individual VHPAers and VHCMAers (and other interested parties) to provide their personal comments. Other works are simply used to help organize the personal comments and to round out the story. All VHPA histories are "living" meaning that additions and corrections are always welcome. All VHPA histories are periodically reprinted in the VHPA Historical Reference Directory; normally on a five year cycle. VHPA member Mike Sloniker volunteered to maintain this VHPA history of Lam Son 719. Anyone with comments, corrections, updates, etc. for this history is encourage to contact Mike Sloniker directly or via VHPA headquarters.

The reader is encouraged to review the [of terms on page 287](#) and the [of aviation units](#) for Lam Son 719 .

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Preparation Phase - Prior to January 29.

Most published histories divide Lam Son 719 into four phases with the first starting on 29 January when U.S. Army ground units would begin reopening and securing Route 9 and reoccupying Khe Sanh as a forward supply base. The "Preparation Phase" section of this VHPA history attempts to describe the preparation and relocation activities of the helicopter units that supported this operation.

As outlined in Into Laos, the planning for Dewey Canyon II and Lam Son 719 was a carefully guarded secret and only a few individuals knew what was really being planned. VHPA member Ed Strazzini provides a description of how the planning was carried out:

From July 1970 through July 1971, I flew CH-54As, the Flying Crane, for the 478th Aviation Company (Heavy Helicopter). The company headquarters was located in Camp Viking at Red Beach just north of DaNang. Our aviation maintenance platoon was located several miles away at a site called Freedom Hill. At this time we were attached to the 159th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion, headquartered at Phu Bai, which was part of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). We supported units of the 101st and any other I Corps Army, Air Force, Marine, Navy, and ARVN unit as coordinated through XXIV Corps headquarters at Camp Love near China Beach. One morning in mid-January, while serving as the Operations Officer for the 478th, I was contacted by COL John Mason, the XXIV Corps Engineer Officer, who asked me to meet with him and the CO of the 45th Engineer Brigade as soon as I could. We met that afternoon in the brigade CO's office which had recently located into the former Seabee compound adjacent to Camp Viking. For about an hour I briefed them on the capabilities of our Flying Cranes. Specifically they appeared to be interested in our ability to airlift and position steel bridge sections. One such section I recall weighed about 12,000 pounds and spanned about 30 feet. Their questions also focused on our capability to hover and lower a bridge section along roadways and trails adjacent to steeply rising terrain. At the conclusion of the briefing, COL Mason accompanied me to my jeep. As I had been his pilot in the 24th Engineer Group in Germany, I took the opportunity to inquire as to when we might expect to fly such a bridge lift mission. "You know the Vietnamese New Year is coming up soon," he replied, "and historically this has been a time of expanded hostilities; we just want to be prepared; we don't have anything in particular in mind at this time." Nothing extraordinary happened involving bridges during Tet

of 1971. However, three weeks after visiting with COL Mason, I, along with four other CH-54 ACs and a large number of 159th ASHB pilots, were in a Phu Bai briefing room learning how we would participate in an operation named Dewey Canyon II.

LTC Bob Molinelli was the CO of the 101st Airborne's Air Cavalry Squadron, the 2/17th CAV, and would be responsible for all Air Cavalry operations during Dewey Canyon II and Lam Son 719. Sadly, he passed away several years ago but VHPA member Steve Powers describes the man and some of the things they did:

Flying with the 2/17 CAV, Headquarters Troop I often flew with the C.O., LTC Bob Molinelli, on his "C&C" missions. He didn't always remember he was C&C and frequently reverted to "Little Bird" to do the scouting. Not being a little bird we took numerous hits, and on two occasions a few too many. Funny, but it seemed to please him for he really was leading his troops and this was his proof. The A Shau Valley was part of our A.O., and in the valley there were elk and pigs. Being from Montana, COL. Molinelli was a hunter and he wanted a pig but we could never herd one into the open. The elk were easy, a few concussion grenades and they would be out of the foliage and into the clear where the gunner would down him with his 60. Sitting there while the crew chief tied the elk to the skid all I could think of was a spider hole opening up and the making of another war story for the other side. Then we would fly back lopsided, these are some large animals and if anybody had done a lateral C.G. in those days we sure would have been way out. Hovering at Saber the chief would cut the trophy off the skid, load it on a mule and take it to the TOC where the colonel would hand it on the squadron sign post and skin it himself. The elk was good for a number of meals for the troop and a few "Cav nights" at the "Club". Hunting elk in the Valley was only one of a number of "non standard maneuvers" he practiced. Another was mounting rocket pods on his C&C ship so he could find and mark his own targets; WP on one side, nails on the other. On occasion finding and marking was not good enough. He also would sling mogas, drop it on bunkers, then swing around and light it with the WP. These practices seem off the wall, but Col. Molinelli was one of those guys that truly DID what he asked of his people. You owe a colonel respect for his rank, Col. Molinelli paid for his on most every flight he made in the AO. A few years back the big C&C called in "Cheyenne Phantom", but he'll still be around in war stories that will only get better the older we get. (Col. Molinelli's call sign "Cheyenne Phantom" came from his test flight days in the Cheyenne Helicopter program.) Speaking of war stories - my first day in the Cav should have been a hint as to what was to come. I showed up on Scabbard Pad at Camp Eagle late on a Sunday afternoon about as green as they come. Nothing but the TOC was open, I couldn't even sign into the unit. WO Frank Beckham showed up and gave me the new guy tour of the troop area. At some point he must have mentioned he was flying stand-by nighthawk that night it didn't mean anything to me until he got scrambled. His co-pilot was drunk. He also had all his flight gear on the club's ready board, including his extra, extra small helmet and something called a "chicken plate". New guys don't know anything. Right now I was the new nighthawk co-pilot. (I still hate night flights.) Co-pilot? Maybe right seat ballast would be more accurate. Well here we go, she's all run up with no checklist, pulling pitch with no conversation and me still trying to fit into this thimble of a helmet. Who could possibly listen to all three of those radios and where the Hell are some lights or orientation? OH - That's what instruments are for! And me with a TAC ticket, I can barely spell VOR.... We found the right area and now there were lights all over the place, our search light, the mini guns almost animated snaking streams of light reaching for the

ground, another first for me, and little bits of light coming our way! More first. Now I wasn't just a bystander, I had completed my transition into a scared participant and stayed that way for the rest of the year. When the night's events in the A.O. let up and we went "home" I was in for more firsts. We found some "good size" holes in the ship and I was informed that my "cherry had been busted". At the club the tradition was to drink Flaming Mother f%#&ers to celebrate this first. Since I had not signed into the unit yet and it being my first mission a few thought it appropriate to christen me "the whore". Thinking back there were many more firsts to come, Elephant Valley, A Shau Valley, Khe Sanh, Lam Son 719 and Laos. Late in '70 I flew a photo mission into Laos along a highway to a city named Chepone. Little did I know it was part of the planning of Lam Son 719. The movie camera was mounted like a minigun, when locked in it would take pictures of whatever we flew over. When we found something, the camera operator would unlock the camera and photo it as we held a pattern around it. As Lam Son became bogged down and we started to finish up, I noted we never did make it to that city - maybe it wasn't an objective, but then again we didn't stop the flow of troops or supplies either.

As part of the build-up to support this large operation, the 1st Avn Bde did not want too many of its assets transferred to the 101st Abn Div for several reasons. Two of its aviation battalions (the 14th and the 223rd) were preparing to stand-down. While the 14th Bn was an operating CAB, the 223rd was a fixed wing unit that needed a quick conversion to a CAB. Other 1st Avn Bde assets sent small detachments to Dong Ha with helicopter S-3 and S-4 experience to rebuild the 223rd. C Troop 7/17th Cav moved to Quang Tri and was attached to the 223rd Avn Bn as part of the 1st Avn Bde's contribution to this operation. At least two weeks prior to the move, C Troop had been given a warning order that they could be moving from Lane AAF near Qui Nhon.

VHPA Members Don Purser provides detailed about C/7/17th Cav:

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!

19 Jan - The Department of the Army authorized the detailed plans for Operation Dewey Canyon II / Lam Son 719.

20 Jan -XXIV and I Corps completed the draft of the operations order.

21 Jan - XXIV and I Corps revised and finalized the operations order.

23 Jan - The 14th CAB's ORLL for the period ending 30 April 1971 states:

On 23 January 1971, the Battalion was notified that two assault companies and one assault support company would be redeployed in support of a tactical operation. Due to strict security measures, minimal information was made available during the planning stages, as to where, who, and for how long, these units would be detached from the Battalion. Two days prior to the departure date, which until this time was unknown, the Company Commanders of the 71st, 174th AHC, and the 132nd ASHC were informed of their destination.

25 Jan - The 1st Bde 5th Inf (Mech) would play a key role in Dewey Canyon II. It was reinforced with a full tank battalion, an Infantry battalion and an armored cav sqdn because it was the vanguard for the push through Khe Sanh to the boarder. Into Laos gives this brigade and its Commander, BG John Hill, a VHPA member, very high marks. VHPA member Pappy Cowan provides some additional information:

I was a CW2 flight instructor at Ft. Wolters when I first met COL John Hill. He was one of my four student pilots. We often trained senior officers for the Army, indeed all services except the Air Force. John was a great person and a great soldier, easy to like. We respected each other a lot. I saw him again while he was at Rucker and I was going to CH-47 transition. He was promoted to BG and given command of the 1st Bde 5th Mech in Vietnam when I arrived at the Cam Rang Replacement Bn on my second tour. I later learned he had known I was enroute to Vietnam and had asked that I be assigned to his Bde. I didn't know this and was simply sent to this strange unit at Quang Tri. I wasn't in a very good mood. I certainly didn't want to fly chinooks and I had no idea why I was waiting in this Infantry unit's TOC. Then I heard John's voice down the hall. He came up to me and said he wanted me to be his pilot - well that changed everything and was fine with me. I remembered Quang Tri from my first tour with the 1st Cav but was shocked when I saw it again in 1970. It was a huge base - at least 2 1/2 by 2 miles! The Bde's Aviation Detachment had four Hueys and six 58s. The 58s were mostly used as couriers and liaison ships; rarely for recon. Most of the time they'd be sent to get a Bn CO for a conference. The Hueys were C&C birds. Ours had seven extra radios in the back. His aide and the CSMG always flew in the back and manned radios. John was a pilot and a real combat man. My job was to keep us from crashing into any mountains and to make certain we didn't get shot down by the artillery. We survived the artillery but did get blown away by a claymore mine once on take off after landing on QL1. It was a brand new Huey, only had 6 hours on it!! John was forever landing at strange places to look at something or talk to a tanker or whatever. He talked me into things I would never have done otherwise. Things were always exciting with John!! I had one rule - that we would never shut down in the weeds. Often he would land. He, his aide, and the CSMG would get out, then I'd go orbit and wait for his call. I remember two months before Dewey Canyon II we spent a lot of time low leveling QL9 which was serious Indian Country as far as I was concerned. I was very familiar with all this area having flown it during Tet '68 with the 229th in the 1st Cav. I remembered a lot of bad spots and here I was again landing in the same ones. Needless to say but I felt a thousand eyes on me and a hundred AK47s pointed at me. Once he landed on an old bridge. It was so tight that we could hardly open the pilot doors. Naturally, he had access to Intel that I didn't. When he gets back in the ship, he says - "Don't worry Pappy, they aren't here yet!" Many folks will tell you they were the first to open Khe Sanh. I always let them tell their story first, then I tell mine. John had taken us out to Khe

Sanh early in the game. We had picked out an old revetment area and landed with a mine sweeper team. After they cleared an area, the crew and I set up the 60s as a perimeter and tarps to sleep under. We were there five nights before the armor units arrived! Into Laos mentions that John would often spend the night with one of his units. This is certainly true. Many times we'd land to a flashlight in a wide spot in the road to leave him off with a ruck and a 16. About mid-morning the next day I'd pick him up someplace else down the road. I got a lot of Huey single pilot time during that tour. After Khe Sanh was officially reoccupied I borrowed a bull dozer and dug us a proper bunker. Then I used some of my 1st Cav "training" (if you needed it and it wasn't guarded or nailed down and it would fit in a Huey; it was yours) to outfit this bunker deluxe. Once John called for the Huey and I said I'd be right there. When I landed we had to off load two 12X12 by 30 foot bridge timbers before we could go where he wanted to. He just shook his head and smiled; never said anything. John turned out to be a hell of a good Huey pilot in addition to being a top flight Brigade CO.

27 Jan - The 14th CAB's ORLL report states:

On 27 January 1971, word was received to plan to move the Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company. This created problems of transportation requirements, obtaining equipment that were on authorized turn in, plus coordinating the transfer of operational control of the two remaining assault companies and one assault support company over to the 123rd Aviation Battalion.

Phase One - 29 January to 8 February.

29 Jan - D day for Dewey Canyon II was 0400 hours on the 29th when armored units for the 1st Bde 5th Mech left Quang Tri for Dong Ha then turned on Route 9 to move to Vandegrift. See The Road to Khe Sanh chapter in *Into Laos* for details.

The 14th CAB's ORLL report states:

The morning of the 29th the Battalion Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 71st AHC, and 132nd ASHC were prepared to depart, with the 174th enroute to Chu Lai from Duc Pho. At approximately 1935 hours, the convoy departed Chu Lai, without overhead cover due to weather, and without communications for security reasons. The trip, which lasted approximately 20 hours, was made in cold raining weather. On 30 January 1971 the convoy and aircraft closed at Quang Tri. Upon arrival, the task of setting up was underway with no permanent shelter, electricity or water facilities available. The 132nd ASHC was OPCON to the 159th ASHB, 101st Airborne Division at Phu Bai.

30 Jan -The aviation units were busy supporting the infantry insertions on the flanks of the armored advance down Route 9 and with helping over the road again. VHPA member Ed Strazzini, who flew CH-54As for the 478th, continues:

The day after the briefing for the 159th ASHB ACs in Phu Bai, we flew into the logistics support site at Mai Loc to begin our mission. Eleven of the bridge sections described by COL Mason lay in parallel among tons and tons of other materials. Each one was rigged and ready for the flying cranes to airlift and emplace at the direction of engineer teams at eleven road cuts along a 17 Km segment of QL9 past Vandergrif. That morning I lifted the first bridge from Mai Loc up over the high ridge due west tracking along the Song Quang Tri river valley and put it into place at the eastern most road cut. As each section demanded precise positioning, engineers manipulated tag lines while we hovered with the load only inches off the ground and with our rotor blades only a few scant feet from the steeply rising slopes on the northern edge of the roadway. The FEs in each aircraft's aft pilot station provided the precise verbal guidance to their pilots as well as timely hoist control which enabled accurate and quick placement of these ungainly loads. When we lifted clear of a secured section, the forward elements of a seemingly endless convoy which stretched all the way back to Quang Tri, lurched forward toward Khe Sanh. Just ahead of this procession one more CH-54 settled into a hover over the next road cut while sand blasted soldiers struggled to position another section until all eleven were completed. I recall that the whole job took less two hours. The road to Khe Sanh was then open and this incredible convoy proceeded unimpeded. The three Skycranes then joined up with the other two airlifting high priority cargo from Mai Loc, Dong Ha, and Quang Tri into Kilo Sierra as it became known.

31 Jan - At 1130, Route 9 was declared open to tracked vehicles all the way to Khe Sanh. The 48th AHC moved over 300 miles to Dong Ha from Ninh Hoa in II Corps. The 14th CAB (-) became tactically operational at Quang Tri. VHPA member Cliff Whiting was TRAPS 39 during this operation and remembers:

The 48th had supported the 9th Korean Division from Ninh Hoa for a long time, so we were really new to I Corps. In the beginning it was cool, rainy, wet, and sometimes cold at Dong Ha, our new home near the DMZ. In the excitement of finding and landing at Dong Ha, two of our aircraft almost had a mid-air. Fortunately it didn't happen. The lesson was learned to always keep your eyes open - stay alert. The first night there we slept in our aircraft. Several of us borrowed ARVN bulldozers to move and dislodge soil to level areas for our tents and the construction of bunkers. The bunkers were built quickly and in haste because on the second night at Dong Ha we had five double deuce (122mm) rockets land in our compound. No one slept that night! Fear of being in a direct hit made us feel we were extremely vulnerable to disaster and death. The first week was a test of "getting ready" - tents up, sand bagging, eating C- rations, in a wall of mud. There were no showers and no latrines. However, I dug a wide ditch with a bulldozer, laid a piece of PSP across it, and everyone just did their business into one big hole. The unit did build a better latrine and a cold shower facility in the weeks to come. Everything had to be done quickly at first for immediate usage, then again for quality. Between the sand bagging in the mud, incoming mortars, and constantly building and bettering of our quarters; there was little time to relax. Even when we had a sit down minute, there was that constant harassment and fear of being hit by incoming. My basic diet for the entire Lam Son operation was warm Fanta orange sodas, C- rations, and mosquitoes. My favorite meal in those days was chicken in water. It was the only one I could eat that was decent, the rest were like dogfood.

VHPA member Dale McClure, also in the 48th AHC, remembers:

I had just returned from the states to report in to my new assignment with the 48th Assault Company. When I arrived back in country, fellow aviators would have somber faces when I expressed that I was in route to the 48th to finish out my remaining four months of tour. I had little faith in Army rumors, but upon reporting in I noted that the entire Company was packing and Major Bunting, "We need a lot of pilots like you where we are going." In the camp the rumors were rampant. Jesse Dize was confident we were going to stage a major attempt to free prisoners out of North Vietnam. Others were sure of an all out attack of the North. No one had any idea of how big or exactly what we were going to do. That evening the Major had a meeting to explain that we were headed to Dong Ha, a deserted Marine base just south of the DMZ. When you previously had been flying in the Central Highlands around Ban Me Thout, this abbreviation was not the location you desire. Usually the Army valued their \$250,000 choppers and wanted them in a secure area at night. The next day we took off to the north with frequent stops to refuel the hungry Hueys (115 gallons per hour). As we stopped many other flights requested permission to refuel using the last digits of their tail number. We were instructed to use no call signs. The high command felt Charlie might get an advantage if he knew where all the aviation equipment had come from. Upon hearing and seeing all the helicopters we began to realize the scope of this operation. None of us realized that the Army had this many Slicks, Gunships, Chinooks, and Cranes in country. I remember Warrant Officer Childs saying he felt this was the start of WWII. We still had not been told exactly what we were going to do. That night we pitched a 30 x 40 Army tent and slept on the ground. Hey, we were pilots and we were supposed to have decent quarters! We continued to set up camp the next day when we were finally briefed on the invasion into Laos or Lam Son 719. Since I had just reported in, I did not fly the first day into enemy territory, but the fellow pilots that did said you can tell right where the border is as the NVA fired immediately. Needless to say the Company quickly gave me a check ride so that I could join in the fun.

1 Feb - VHPA member Ed Newton, a maintenance officer in the 48th AHC, remembers:

I received my orders to join the 48th (Bluestars / Jokers) in September, 1970. Since I was an Aviation Maintenance Officer Course (AMOC 70-21) graduate, I was assigned to the Maintenance Platoon (Hanger Rats). My responsibilities were maintenance quality control officer and maintenance test pilot. At a company formation on Jan 24, our CO MAJ Willis Bunting briefed us on a large military operation which was to take place in northern I Corps. He couldn't give us details but told us to be prepared to move to an undisclosed location for a two to three month stay. Immediately following the formation, the maintenance officers held our own meeting. We had been advised at the beginning of the month to transfer three of our best UH-1Hs to the VNAF. Additionally we were to downsize our parts inventory as the 48th was scheduled to stand down within six to eight months. CPT Winston Moore, the Service Platoon Leader, and CPT Thomas Cole, the Maintenance Platoon Leader, began to assign duties to CW2 Steve Dixon, CW2 John Wallace and myself. CPT Moore had to get all the vehicles in the motor pool into top shape for the long trek up Highway 1. He and CPT Cole also had to coordinate an airlift of some of our equipment by C-130s out of Nha Trang. We knew the operation was going to be big when we received top priority to requisition almost any equipment we needed from a huge stockyard in Nha Trang. Some of this equipment was tents, portable generators, flood lights, immersion heaters, conexes, electric and commo wire.

In the company area, we were packing our maintenance and parts manuals, spare parts, tools and even a couple of refrigerators. All the helicopters were given a quick inspection and every part that showed any wear was replaced. Some helicopters, which were near their 100 hour PE inspections, were pulled onto the ramps and the inspection was completed early. Three helicopters were assigned to the 48th from other units to replace the ones we gave to the VNAF. This gave us a total of 21 UH-1Hs (ten per flight platoon and 1 maintenance) and eight UH-1Cs. We worked hard and were ready. The move took place in three phases. The trucks left first. They were carrying the heavy equipment, avionics, tools, parts and manuals. Each truck had two or three EM riding "shot gun", armed with M16s, M60s, and M79s, wearing helmets and flak jackets. Two light fire teams from the Jokers were assigned to fly gun cover for the convoy. I recall hearing that they came under attack with small arms and RPGs as they went thru a pass north of Da Nang. The Jokers took care of the attackers. The second group left Jan 31st with half the helicopters loaded with company personnel and their TA 50 gear. The third group left the next day with the remaining helicopters and personnel. I was with the last group. It was my responsibility to make sure all the helicopters were up and flyable, repair any that broke enroute and above all leave nothing of value behind. We took off at 8 a.m., flew north along the coast in loose trail and made a number of fuel stops enroute. The trip was uneventful until the last leg. We had refueled at Quang Tri and tightened up the formation so we would look good landing at our new home, Dong Ha. Just when everything was looking good, a call came on guard "Flight of Hueys north-bound on Highway 1, make an immediate turn - you're about to enter the DMZ!"

Well flight lead, who's name will not be spoken here but who was our unit IP, made a hard right turn out over the coast. He finally found Route 9 and led us to Dong Ha. The 48th found itself in the middle of a South Vietnamese staging base for the 1st ARVN Division. The USAF had built a new aluminum plank runway and set up a GCA. It seemed C130s were landing and taking off every couple of minutes day and night. They were off loading cargo and troops for the ARVNs as well as supplies for the 48th and our new sister company on the north side of the field, the 173rd (Robinhoods / Crossbows). We were finally briefed on our mission. The 48th and a number of other helicopter companies were going to airlift the 1st ARVN Division into Laos to interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail as far west as Tcexepone. The new call sign for the slicks was "Senior Traps". The guns were also assigned a new call sign but they still called themselves the "Jokers". We set up our maintenance area near an old round concrete bunker. It rained almost every day the first week and the temps were down in the 40s. The ground turned muddy and we had to lay PSP down to set up our shops and work areas. The shops (electric, sheet metal, engine, avionics and armament) were set up in tents and conexes. Due to the hard work and ingenuity of the Maintenance Platoon EM, we were up and ready to go. Within four days, we were doing a 100 hr PE inspection on one of the UH-1Cs that flew gun cover for the truck convoy.

2 Feb - The American and ARVN units continued to move more and more equipment and troops to Khe Sanh and on past it to several large lager areas on the border.

3 Feb -VHPA member Don Purser provides the following about C/7/17th Cav:

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 ordnance. I doubt the runway was unusable because there were many holes in it. There was wreckage and junk everywhere! It was a scary place!! 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.

4 Feb -The story of how the ATC facilities were reestablished at Khe Sanh is retold on pages 90 through 93 of Laos. Many, many VHPAers and VHCMAers are live because of the assistance the 125th ATC Company provided. This history could certainly use some input from the ATC folk.

5 Feb - D/3/5 Cav lost AH-1G #66-15340 at XD865443 and crew (WO1 James L Paul and WO1 Carl M. Wood) while supporting the 1st Bde 5th Inf (Mech). According to Into Laos they were the first casualties of the operation. Weather was a factor because they flew into the side of a cliff northwest of Khe Sanh. Their bodies were never recovered. Details should be reported to the VHPA.

6 Feb - The story of a Navy jet fighter accidentally bombing an ARVN armored unit near Lang Vie at 1920 hours is retold on pages 97 through 99 of Into Laos. Without any doubt these events kept the DUSTOFF units busy for most of the evening.

The 178th ASHC lost CH-47B #67-18493 and a crew of six but this aircraft's mission does not appear to be related to Dewey Canyon II.

7 Feb - The 14th CAB's ORLL reports that from 1 February to 7 February, the Battalion (-) was involved in support of Operation Dewey Canyon II, with 50% in general support of the 101st Airborne Division and XXIV Corps.

Phase Two - 8 February to 6 March.

Background Information - The following paragraphs attempt to outline relationships, mission assignments, policies, and practices that were "business as usually" or that happened during Lam Son 719 either by design or by accident. This background information should help the reader get more meaning for the remaining material.

As a general rule, an Assault Helicopter Battalion was placed in direct support of each major ARVN command. For example, the 223d CAB was in direct support of the 1st ARVN Inf Div. Thus all airmobile assaults conducted by the 1st ARVN Inf Dive were controlled by the 223d CAB and all general support aircraft (Huey) required by the 1st ARVN Inf Div were provided by the 223d CAB. The 158th AHB was in direct support of the 1st ARVN Airborne Div and the 1st ARVN Ranger Group. The 14th CAB was in direct support of the VNMC Div.

The 159th ASHB had the responsibility for coordinating and performing all heavy lift missions. As a general rule, the Army crains from the 478th Avn Co provided heavy lift north of Route 9 while the Marine Corps HMH-463 covered the area south of Route 9.

The 2d Sqdn 17th Cav had the responsibility for coordinating and performing all air cavalry missions. As a general rule, C/2/17 Cav and C/7/17 Cav supported the Ranger, Airborne and Armored units astride and to the north of Route 9 while A/2/17 Cav and B/7/1 Cav supported the 1st ARVN Inf Div and the VNMC units south of Route 9. The 2/17th Cav received missions directly from the ARVN 1st Corps. Many senior commanders were very interested in knowing when the NVA reinforcements would arrive from North Vietnam. As a result many Air Cav missions were flown far north of Route 9 to "find" these new units. The Air Cav units did make very impressive "finds" of tank and truck parks, fuel and ammunition storage areas, petroleum pipe lines, etc. They, and the "fast movers" they called in, certainly destroyed a great deal of NVA material during these operations. None of these troops had US Infantry in their aero-rifle platoons, rather the HAC BAO Company from the 1st ARVN Inf Div was used for security and / or extraction of downed aircraft and crews in Laos. Not long after the battle intensified, many Troops generally stopped flying their OH-6As into Laos. Instead, the AH-1G became an armed scout aircraft and an air cavalry reconnaissance team was generally made up of three AH-1Gs plus a single UH-1H in a C&C and rescue role.

8 Feb - The 1st Armored Bde crossed into Laos at 1000 hours and advanced 9Ks west on Route 9. The 101st Div's ORLL reports that three battalions of the 3d Regt, 1st ARVN Inf Div air assaulted into FBs HOTEL and BLUE south of Route 9. Two battalions of the 1st ARVN Abn Div air assaulted into LZ 30 and LZ 31 north of Route 9. One ARVN Ranger battalion air

assaulted into LZ RANGER SOUTH. 105mm batteries were landed on LZs HOTEL, 30, and 31. The 14th CAB's ORLL reports:

On the 7th, a Battalion Forward was established at Khe Sanh. This alleviated problems that had arisen because of a lack of coordination with the forward units. It also made available flight following for all aircraft within the Battalion, which up to that time was limited due to distance. Problems did arise, due to the lack of available communications equipment. The need for UHF radios was immediately apparent and both the forward and rear established UHF capabilities. On the 8th, in support of Operation Lam Son 719, the Battalion (-) was involved in the initial insertion into Laos. The 174th supported this combat assault, under direct control of the 223rd Combat Aviation Battalion, into LZ Hotel (XD725344), moving 265 ARVN troops for a total of 1000 troops. The assault force encountered numerous anti-aircraft positions and intensive hostile fire which resulted in one aircraft receiving hits in which the aircraft commander was killed. (Editor's note: WO Robert B. Gentry of the 174th AHC died while departing LZ HOTEL when the cockpit was hit by machine gun fire.) During the remainder of the month, the Battalion (-) was involved with combat assaults for the 1/5 Mech and continued general support for the 101st Airborne Division and XXIV Corps, with minor support to the 1st ARVN Division, ARVN Rangers and the ARVN Marines.

C/158 Avn lost UH-1H #68-16307 at XD582368 and crew (CW2 Paul C. Stewart, AC, WO1 Thomas P. Doody, pilot, SP4 Charles G. Bobo, CE, PFC John E. Robertson, gunner) with an ARVN soldier. The MIA synopsis reports:

The helicopter was operating about 10 miles west of Lao Bao on an insertion mission. Stewart radioed the flight leader that his aircraft had sustained damage to the tail rotor by ground fire, and that he was returning to the PZ, which was about five miles inside Vietnam. While the aircraft was in route, Stewart radioed that he had inverted and was going in, and nothing further was heard. The flight leader then observed a column of smoke coming from the crash site. The Cobra team accompanying the operation was dispatched immediately, but detected no signs of survivors in the area of the wreckage. Several burned remains were seen around the wreckage. It was determined that the aircraft had crashed, exploded on impact, and burned. The remains were identified as Doody, Bobo and Robertson. A fourth body was determined to be that of an ARVN on board the aircraft. No trace of Stewart was found. It could not be determined whether he burned in the crash or was thrown clear of the aircraft as it impacted.

B/7/1 CAV lost their C&C UH-1H and part of the crew (CPT David N. Fox, co-pilot, and the door gunner (name as yet unknown) died while SGT John Seaman, the CE, and CPT Joe Beardon, pilot, were injured but rescued). VHPA member Lyle Borders was flying a Cobra that day and remembers:

It was about noon and my team was returning from the AO to refuel. We had been screening for the 1st ARVN but hadn't found much. A few minutes after the replacement team passed us they started calling that they were taking fire at 4,000 feet and that the C&C ship was going down on fire.

VHPA member Cliff Whiting, Traps 39 with the 48th AHC, remembers:

Time permitting I would dash off a letter to my wife. All my letters were dated and numbers in sequence. She saved every one. For the first time in 22 years, we both reread the 300 plus letters last year. Quoting from my letter #231 dated Feb 9, 1971, 10:15 a.m.: "Bright and early yesterday morning at 7:15, Monday, February 8, we took off for Khe Sanh from Dong Ha. We refueled in LZ Stud (Vandegrift) and got to Khe Sanh around 8:00 a.m. At 10:00 a.m. sharp, our ten slicks plus ten others from another company, crossed over into Laos loaded with 1st ARVN Division troops. I was Chalk 4 in the formation. All total, I made 15 sorties (landings) into Laos during the day. I guess I am real lucky because in our company we had two aircraft shot down and four more shot up. That afternoon the Blue Stars (Traps) had only three aircraft still in the air, of the original ten that started the day. I was one of the three. Major Bunting and Danny Grossman were the lead aircraft until they were shot down, then the Major took my peter pilots seat. I was lead ship for the remainder of the day. The Major worked the radios and I did the flying. Flew a total of eight hours. Higher ups wanted us to stay in Khe Sanh for the night, but we got to go back to Dong Ha. (Now I'm inside my tent at 6 p.m. Haven't had a shower now for 11 days. Today, low clouds, heavy rain, and fog preventing us from flying back into Laos."

VHPA member Jesse Dize, also with the 48th AHC, recalls:

Before Lam Son 719, I had not been in a crunch situation in the Old Dog with the new engine. (See Jesse's comments on 11 Mar for some background information about his aircraft named the "Old Dog" and its crew chief, SP4 Mike Sather.) Previously, when the stuff-hit-the-fan, I would pulled power until, bleeding off main rotor RPM, the RPM Warning sounded. Then I would reduced power ever-so-slightly, look at the RPM guage to ensure 6200 or more RPM, and hold that power until we were safe. This system didn't work with the new engine. I don't know if the RPM would have ever bled-off in the "new" Old Dog. I had been wounded near Pleiku while five 48th ships had been OPCONed to the 57th. I had flown as a gunner with the Jokers (WO1 Fred Cristman was a good friend, classmate, and hooch-mate let me fly on his ship) during our "get-acquanted to I Corps" CAs. That was until Major Bunting "relieved" as a gunner, but my leg had healed by then so I went back to flying AC with the slicks. My first CA was into HOTEL or HOTEL ONE. WO1 Ed Newton was my co-pilot. Normally Ed was one of our maintenance pukes. I still don't know why he was with we me out there west-of-the-border. (Editor's note: Ed explains why in his comments on 19 Feb.) HOTEL was "hot," very "hot." The radio traffic was horrendous. Everyone was taking fire. As our last pack unassed the aircraft someone yelled mortars! and I pulled power. Ed said something to the effect, "do you think 54 pounds (of torque) is enough!" ED was cool, real cool, and he was a maintenance puke. I looked over at the gauges, no Main Rotor bleed off, RPM stable at 6600, but, by now, the torque was at 56 pounds. We made it out of there without a hit. My technique worked.

The next day it was Ed's turn. I think it was into LZ BRAVO this time. He copied my technique and again it worked again -- no hits. However, we were relegated to ash-and trash on the third day and the sins of our past caught up with us. The 42 gear box chip light illuminated. We then went throught the drill of landing ASAP, and then draining, flushing and refilling the gear box. A couple of hours later another chip light on the 42 and a repeat of the same drill. Then we had a chip light on the 90 and another flush and fill drill. Before it was over, Ed had to change out the 42 and 90 gear boxes. On our third assault we practiced good torque management and did not exceed any limitations. Apparently our early technique was more effective, at least

for going into "hot" LZs. We had a hole, running left to right, in our left skid this time. Ed had lost his cherry. Ed went back to full time maintenance after that. It was not because he was scared or a quitter. No, Ed was cool under fire. At least he wasn't like me. If I was on the controls when the things started to happen, usually indicated by green streaks of light and/or funny little noises, my right index finger would involuntarily squeeze the comms trigger to death and everyone in the world could hear me talking, or more, truthfully, screaming. Ed never did this. Aircraft were going wanting for test flights and MOCs and other such things. So, Major Bunding ordered Ed to get back to work fixing helicopters and stop having so much fun over in Laos. The Old Dog was the only aircraft in the company that was wired for a rescue hoist. Some how, a hoist was obtained and installed complete with Jungle Penetrator. From that point on I flew trail. My job was to follow any aircraft that went down and recover the crew. I never got to perform that job.

VHPA member Tom Marshall wrote Woodstock One-Three which covers his year in Vietnam. The following was extracted from his narrative:

I had flown with the Phoenix until 20 Jan when I joined the 163rd Aviation Company at Camp Eagle. At that time the 163rd had 12 UH-1Hs and 10 OH-58s. I flew Hueys for a while then transitioned into the Loach and I really enjoyed flying that bird. Soon after I joined them, we were informed that our "Roadrunner" call sign would have to change. That night, we watched the movie, "Woodstock", showing the bands, "group Love-Ins", and other activities underway at the 1969 Woodstock Festival in New York. After the movie we were in the club and people were proposing call signs. Finally Jim Patterson, we called him "Baby Sahn", came up with the idea, "Hey, you guys read Peanuts, the cartoon strip with Charlie Brown? What's the name of that little, yellow bird?" For a minute, nobody could think of the name of the bird. And then, everybody started cracking up and cursing, and all of a sudden, someone remembered, "Woodstock!". At that point, after having just seen the movie, the call sign "Woodstock" referring to the little bird in the cartoon was a perfect double entendre, which suited our declining attitudes regarding the war. From that day forward, I was "Woodstock One-Three". During normal times the 163rd was the general support aviation company for the 101st Airborne as part of its airmobile division configuration. It had two primary missions - providing C&C birds for the generals and their staffs. This often extended to senior officers in XXIV Corp and the ARVN I Corps. Our second mission was to provide courier ships for the major support commands within the division. For example, we would fly personnel with orders or other important instructions (like SIOs) to the firebases. Dewey Canyon II hadn't been under way long when our 58s were given the additional mission as "white teams" with scouting, reconnaissance, and convey escort roles. Today I was flying a Loach and picked up an Infantry Major at Vandergrift. Even this early in the game, NVA sappers, artillery, and mortars were working Vandergrift. The Infantry had started their "favorite game" - insert into an area where NVA gunners were suspected, then hump around the high ground to find them. The goal of this aggressive patrolling was to keep the NVA moving and to prevent him from setting up bases for permanent raids on us. Most of the time our "white teams" worked with an Air Force FAC and we had one that day. We circled all the hill tops to the east and west of Vandergrift and found a ridge with a suspected mortar location. I contacted the FAC and marked it. Soon he had a Marine A-4 Skyhawk that was returning from Laos with a full load of 37mm cannon. We watched from a half mile away as he absolutely ripped the top of the mountain from one end to the other. After

that we put in our own mortar prep, then I dropped smoke for the Slicks taking in a two-platoon drop who would walk back to Vandergrift in an attempt to flush out any would-be attackers. With the smoke out, I backed off and climbed to 1,000 feet. I took movies of the combat assault. I still enjoy watching those movies. Boy, we did good work! Hueys coming in, one at a time, dropping their men, doing a vertical departure with a 180 degree turn. It was a helicopter ballet with the timing down to only a few seconds between aircraft. The insertion was cold and the troops returned without making contact. I really enjoyed working with ground units from the loach.

9 Feb - All air moves were canceled due to adverse weather. The 1st Armored Bde moved 2Ks west on Route 9. CPT Stephen L. Whisenant and CW2 James F. Collins of D/101 AVN 101 ABN died in a UH-1C at XD901433. Details about this incident are not known. The A/101st AHB's ORLL reports:

On the night of 8 and 9 Feb, the Comancheros RON at Khe Sanh. Unable to depart when released at 090800 due to weather, the aircraft await the return to the company area. By 1500 hours, weather breaks and CPT Federovich begins to call the flight out one at a time. Four Cobra gunships of D/101st elect to depart Khe Sanh following the slicks. Hawk 14 is shot down in bad weather 3 kilometers NE of Khe Sanh at 1630 hours.

VHPA member Bob Bearer was VARSITY 14 flying CH-47s for B/159 ASHB. He recalls:

I joined B/159 on May 15, 1970 while they were still at Camp Eagle and was part of the move in September to Phu Bai. With this move, the entire battalion was now located at Phu Bai. I remember we were assigned several old two story former Marine barracks. They needed lots of help so we went to Da Nang and landed inside a logistics compound that had all sorts of lumber and electrical items. We negotiated with the NCOIC but weren't getting too far. It was getting late in the day and the NCO kept talking about locking up and going home. We decided to try to trick him with the broken Chinook routine. We pretended to leave ourselves. We started the aircraft then suddenly shut it down, ran outside and started opening up panels. A Chinook has more than enough panels so we could make it look pretty sorry in a hurry. The NCO came out and asked what was wrong. We told him something and said it would take some time to fix. He complained that he had to lock up and leave. We said - fine, we'd just work on our ship. Naturally when he was gone we loaded up with what we needed and flew over his locked gate. But that was prior to Lam Son 719. The first we knew about the operation was when most of the ACs flew to Eagle one might for a big secret briefing. We were told we would move to Khe Sanh within three days and that we'd be there without any bunkers for awhile. We were all delighted to hear this! Someone in the higher command must have changed his mind but for three days we flew our missions with all our stuff in the back expecting to stay the night at Khe Sanh. Our Battalion CO at the time was LTC George Newton. Most of the time he coordinated our activities from an OH-6A, sometimes from a Huey. During the early days of the operation, we'd brief at Khe Sanh then go to Vandergiff to pick up bridging and culverts to insert on the road to Laos. We helped restore the road all the way to the border but I don't remember helping the ARVN with the roads in Laos itself. The Battalion maintain an LNO at Khe Sanh. We'd check in with him or with the Battalion C&C for our missions during the day. The haze, smoke and dust were so bad I was surprised we didn't have lots of midairs.

VHPA Members Peter Smith and Bob Bearer, in separate conversations, provide an interesting Chinook story.

We were both ACs at the time and happened to fly together on this day in a C/159 PLAYTEX ship. Bob maintains that both he and Peter were "on the list" because of some dropped loads of late. They were told to pick up a Cobra. Peter says that someone had tried to make a running take off in the Cobra (like the Charlie Model guys had to do) but tripped on the PSP and the blade had hit the tail boom. When they arrived over the Cobra, Peter said that it didn't look right so they had it re-rigged. While this going on, someone called and asked how many cases of beer it would take for them to drop that Cobra over the ocean. Peter replied to whomever this was: "That is not my job." Both pilots maintain that a Cobra was really terrible to carry because it wouldn't naturally streamline. The big blade wanted to make the Cobra fly side ways. A drag chute was attached to the horizontal stabilizers to make them line up with the CH-47s centerline. Even so, the best a Chinook could do was 50 to 60 knots. On this mission, they just got over ocean when the chute broke loose and the blade became untied. Peter said the Cobra started turning as he worked to get it calmed down. Then the FE said: "There it goes!" and the pilots felt that the CH-47 was now unloaded. Peter rolled to one side and watched the Cobra twist and fall. The main blade cut the tail boom off before it fell into the water. Bob remembers thinking about how much more trouble they were going to be in now and was surprised when Peter keyed the radio to say that they had lost the Cobra. According to Bob, the Battalion CO was really upset and ordered them to land at his pad so he could personally inspect what was left of the rigging. They landed and the webbing appeared to have been cut half through at the break point, so the CO agreed that something was wrong, took the sling and let them go. Bob said everything was cool until a couple of days later when a Captain arrived in a jeep with cases of beer and asked: "Who were the guys that dropped the Cobra in the ocean the other day?" Needless to say, but the arrival of the beer got them in trouble again. Peter maintains he didn't know anything about a Captain in a jeep delivering beer but certainly remembers that a case of beer appeared near his bunk just a few days before he DEROSed on 15 Feb!

Even though I was a Senior AC, I enjoyed flying with Bob Bearer especially when the weather was bad. Bob had a special instrument ticket and was a good pilot. The Chinook was really nice to fly IFR because it presented a very stable platform at 40 knots. I remember several times when it was zero, zero working with the instrument landing crews on the ground. It was relatively easy to fly the glide path in a Chinook. I was always amazed when they'd say: "OK your wheels will be touching down in a second" and thump, we feel the wheels touch! I have one memory of my last week flying in Lam Son 719 that sticks out in my mind. All the guys in my company wore an American flag as a shoulder patch with the 101st Eagle on the other shoulder. We were standing around Khe Sanh or someplace talking and waiting when a General lands in his Huey. He came up to us and got upset because the American flag was unauthorized on our uniforms. I was short and I'd had more than enough anyway. I distinctly remember telling the General that we'd be glad to take that patch off when he got us out of this country. I turned and walked away. He yelled at me to come back but I didn't!

10 Feb - A battalion from the 1st ARVN Abn Div air assaulted into LZ ALUOI and at 1555 hours the 1st Armored Bde linked up with the battalion. A battalion from the 1st ARVN Inf Div air assaulted into LZ DELTA. WO1 Mark J. Robertson of B/2/17 CAV 101 ABN died in OH-6A

#66-17765 in activities that were related to Lam Son 719. SP4 Shelby G. Hensley of the 1st AVN BDE also died that day. It is not known if the events that lead to SP4 Hensley death were related to WO Robertson or to Lam Son 719. The book Into Laos does not present the story of the air ambulance support correctly. VHPA members Joel Dozhier and Tom Robinson, from DMZ DUSTOFF, provide these details:

The 237th and 571st MED Detachments had merged into a single operating unit by the time Lam Son 719 started. We both operated from Phu Bai. Historically the 237th's AO was everything north and west of Phu Bai which is why we were called DMZ DUSTOFF. The 571st used to cover everything south and west of the Phu Bai. Our mission that day clearly illustrates this merger because I was assigned to the 237th while Tom was from the 571st. Anyway, we were the third aircraft to try to pickup the crew of a downed Huey west of LZ BROWN. We learned that they had crashed near the base of the escarpment and the NVA had lots of folk along the face of the escarpment. Joel said they kept looking around for the C&C bird as they were briefed. Finally they asked: "Where are you?" Answer: "Your six o'clock, high." Joel maintains that the C&C must have been at 15,000 because it was just a dot in the sky and they were at 4,000! The C&C said they had several guns on hand (3 Cobras and 2 Charlies) and wanted the DUSTOFF ship to make a high overhead spiraling approach to the downed ship. When Joel said that they would rather come in low level, the C&C said that the two previous attempts had been low level and had failed. Both ships were forced to break off the mission because of battle damage. When we were ready to start our spiral approach, the guns prepped the side of the escarpment nearest our intended route and we started down at 3,000 feet per minute. Even though we were falling fast, we were still exposed to the NVA on the escarpment for short periods of time. We took some hits in the cargo area but they weren't serious. The plexiglas on Tom's side blew out from a hit and initially we thought Tom had been hit as well. But he was just showered with plex. The downed ship didn't have any smoke, so once we got to the bottom we moved around until they fired off a pen flare. The downed ship was laying on its side and the crew could stand on it. The trees were tall enough to prevent our landing to the ground but did not stop us from putting a skid on the Huey. The NVA were close at hand because the pilot was firing his pistol at them. Joel believes they got all four into their DUSTOFF bird rather quickly and remembers that the pilot emptied his pistol out the door just as they were pulling out. Joel said that he got a little distracted by the gravity of the situation and pulled too much pitch as they were leaving. The low RPM light came on and the CE would later remark that the rescued pilot's eyes were as big as saucers. Joel says that he guessed the pilot was worried that they might be on the ground again that afternoon! Tom and the EM got Silver Stars for the rescue, but Joel (who was the AC) is not aware if he received one for that action.

B/2/17 Cav lost OH-6A #66-17765 at YC257076 and crew (WO1 Mark J. Robertson, pilot, and SGT Joseph R. Pietrzak, observer). The MIA synopsis reports:

During a VR mission in Thua Thien Province, the helicopter was hit by heavy 51 caliber machine gun fire in the power compartment and fuel section. It burst into flames, fell vertically, and exploded on impact. Other helicopters in the area immediately attempted to land and search the area for survivors, but the crewmen reported that enemy fire and deteriorating weather conditions prevented them from doing so. None of the crews conducting visual searches saw survivors or bodies around the blazing helicopter. Radio frequencies were monitored for a period

after that, with no results. Enemy activity in the area prevented further searches in the loss area near the Laos border.

A VNAF Huey with reporter Larry Burrows was shot down in Laos. Their bodies were never recovered.

11 Feb - The 101st Div's ORLL reports that for the period 11 - 13 Feb:

The armored TF consolidated its position around ALOUI. One ARVN Ranger battalion air assaulted into LZ RANGER NORTH. Two battalions of the 1st Regt, 1st ARVN Inf Div air assaulted into LZ DON and one on DELTA. Additional forces, artillery and supplies were air lifted into ALOUI and other established LZs.

D/3/5 Cav CW2 Kenneth A. Barger and PFC Raymond F. Carroll died in a AH-1G. Only sketchy details about this incident are known.

The official reports state the AH-1G was from the 5th Inf Div (Mech) but brigade's organic aviation only had OH-6As and UH-1Hs. D/3/5 Cav was attached to the 5th Mech at the time. They had Cobras. Most likely CW2 Barger was with D/3/5 Cav. The VHPA KIA database has the comment: "Shot down by a 51 cal trying to pick up a shot down scout one mile northwest of the Rockpile. Radioed OK then A/C rolled and burned trapping both." The coordinates are XD922540. No other pilot is listed as having died in this crash, so we have to assume that PFC Carroll was initially in the scout aircraft that was shot down and that Barger landed to Cobra to medevac Carroll. Please report any details about this matter to the VHPA.

12 Feb - One battalion of the 1st Regt, 1st ARVN Inf Div landed into LZ DELTA I (?). C/2/17 Cav 101 Abn lost AH-1G #68-17089 at XD676488 and crew (CPT Clyde D. Wilkinson AC and CW2 Arthur E. McLeod pilot). Details are as follows:

During an attack on a target, the Cobra was hit by enemy ground fire. They radioed that the engine oil bypass caution light was on and that they would attempt to return to Khe Sanh. The aircraft began to smoke and burn so the crew attempted to land. Just prior to touchdown, the aircraft exploded and crashed, followed by intense fire and ammunition detonation. After the aircraft had cooled, several passes were made overhead, but no survivors were detected. The aircraft had been almost completely consumed by the intense fire and explosions. The search continued by air but no sign of the crew was ever found. Enemy presence prohibited a ground search. Their bodies were not recovered.

13 Feb - The 101st Div's ORLL reports that an airborne battalion was inserted north of LZ 31 as the forces flanking the armor drive moved abreast of ALOUI.

14 Feb - The 101st Div's ORLL reports for the period 14 - 18 that with the armor column making no further progress to the west, the 1st ARVN inf Div turned south expanding its search for enemy supplies and facilities. Elements of the 3d Regt, 1st ARVN Inf Div and accompanying artillery moved to FSB HOTEL II. and LZ GRASS. Attempts to insert a battalion on LZ GREEN

were broken off because of intense enemy fire. Forces in the vicinity of LZ GRASS made increasing contacts with the enemy.

VHPA member Ed Strazzini, who flew CH-54As for the 478th, provides these observations:

The CH-54 missions quickly fell into a routine. Ammo, guns (only the Crane or Marine Sea Stallion could lift the 155mm howitzers at this altitude), engineer equipment, vehicles and general supplies in bundles weighing from 10,000 to 17,000 pounds were shuttled from Khe Sanh west bound to ARVN sites which seemed to spring up each day as their troop pressed on. We were cautioned to avoid NVA anti-aircraft guns, some radar guided, spotted along the Co Roc escarpment, so we varied flight routes and altitudes as much as possible. Since our aircraft were without defensive weapons, AH-1G and UH-1C gunships escorted us in Laos. On one occasion while on long final to a fire base with 10,000 pounds of 155mm powder on the hook, I recall watching one of our escorting Cobras abeam us roll inverted and crash into the trees just outside the base. I alerted his wing-man on our other side and just a little ahead of us as to what I had seen and continued into the site where we delivered the goods. Seconds later we were climbing at 4,000 fpm to an appropriate altitude to return. An unloaded crane could climb faster than another other helicopter in this operation and we took advantage of this capability every time. During a post flight inspection that day, we found a large hole, 51 cal size, about mid-way along our tail boom. At the end of the day each CH-54 (and CH-47 I'd guess) was directed by the 159th ASHB C&C ship into the Kilo Sierra aircraft bone-yard where a damaged Huey or Cobra was rigged and waiting. We came to look upon these bent birds as our tickets back to Phu Bai where we hauled them for repair. We'd be up early the next day and off to rejoin the adventure arrive at Khe Sanh as the sun came up. One oddity I remember dealt with the decision that Lam Son 719 was to be a show of the success of Vietnamization of the war. Although American air support was everywhere, no Americans were supposed to be participating on the ground in Laos. At the end of each sorties we were expected to fill out, in flight, a form which was intended to attest to the purpose of that flight and would specify that no Americans had deplaned in Laos. Of course the CH-54 has no real space for passengers while doing external loads; and we never touched down, but only came to a hover long enough to release or pickup cargo.

15 Feb - C/159 ASHB lost CH-47C # 67-18506 and crew (2LT James H. Taylor, PIC, WO1 Marvin M. Leonard, pilot, WO1 Barry F. Fivelson, passenger, SP4 Donald E. Crone, SP4 John L. Powers, and SP4 Willis C. Crear). The MIA synopsis reports:

WO Marvin Leonard was the pilot of a CH-47C assigned the task of ferrying a load of gasoline into Laos. An observer plane reported that the helicopter overflowed its destination by several miles, then either exploded or broke in half. An aerial search, according to information given to family members, failed to find evidence of a crash. A ground search was not possible because of hostile threat in the area. Note that Joint Casualty Center data remark indicates that a crash site was found and that no survivors were observed from the air.

VHPA member Jim Scott was PLAYTEX 11 and recalls:

I was flying that day but doing something different; so I did not witness this incident. 2LT Taylor was the PIC (Pilot In Charge). He had recently received a direct commission, had come to

us from the 196th ASHC, the Flippers, and was not yet signed off an an A/C. WO1 Leonard was the pilot. He was relatively new in the unit. WO1 Fivelson was just a kid, a new guy. We had used him as an LNO at Khe Sanh for some time. He was riding on this trip as an observer, getting his feet wet, taking pictures. As I understand it, for some reason they took a load to the wrong LZ. Their gunship escorts called and called them, even called on guard (which during Lam Son was a zoo anyway) but never got a reply. They definitely took fire. The load they were carrying may have exploded because they broke in half and went in. I have several general impressions about flying Chinooks in Lam Son. First, I was very impressed and grateful for the gunship support we received. It was super! There was a couple of ways it worked. Sometimes the gun outfits would have LNOs attend our evening briefings for the next day's missions but most of the time we would be flying toward the fence and the gunships would be in an orbit waiting for us. Either they would come up on our freq or we would call them. Linking up just wasn't a problem. Then we would proceed on with the mission. We had lots of Cobra escorts but my heart went out to the Charlie model guys. Even that ancient gunship provided yeoman service. Sometimes the Charlie model guys would have to ask us to slow down; but this wasn't a problem. We tried several different techniques to get the Chinook onto the ARVN base. We tried having the gunship only shoot when we drew fire; but the most popular tactic was to have the gunship prep our approach route to the base. Our loads were relatively small (thank God!) which left us with some flexibility. About the only way you could get in trouble was to land down wind. To stop a CH-47 with a heavy load in a down wind situation required a high nose up attitude. This attitude would partially negate the lift from the aft rotor which usually caused the airframe to fall through. Normally this meant planning an approach to the ground with your load as the machine would not be capable of hovering. As soon as the load touched down in these instances, we released it and hauled out of there for altitude.

These approaches had to be done carefully because if you misjudged and turned out short or long, there was no second try and in many instances, the power needed for a go-around was not available. Our normal approach was to come in high, 7,000 or 8,000 feet AGL, determine the wind direction and our final approach path. We'd tell the guns what we wanted to do and they would prep the area between the base out a quarter of a mile or so under our final approach path. This seemed to keep everyone's heads down. We'd corkscrew down from altitude and pull power at the bottom. Naturally the guns would be watching and ready to pounce on someone that fired at us. Resupply missions were the best because we were only over the base a short time and we were unloaded coming out. The only game in town when coming out was to get altitude as fast as possible. Once we were above 1,500 feet AGL it wasn't too bad. But our gun support was all I could ask for and more and we certainly did not take it for granted - we deeply appreciated it!! Second, we had to fly baby "C"s during Lam Son. Unfortunately for us, this was one of those periods when the Lycoming T-55 L-11 engine was grounded. There was no physical difference between a CH-47C small "C" or Super "C", just the power rating of the engines mounted in the ship. The L-11 was the powerful but troublesome engine used on the Super "C". It pumped out 3,750 shp and occasionally some of its own internal parts! It had a harmonic problem that caused the #2 engine to blow its power turbine section out the exhaust cone. This left you with a rather large and quite useless pure jet until you shut it down. Some of these failures were quite dramatic and catastrophic and mostly unpredictable. It was common for the turbine blades to sever some hydraulic lines and cause a fire. Even though the Super "C" was a little dangerous to fly, we all preferred to have the extra power. The Super "C" engines had a interesting rumbling sound when

things were running smoothly. Getting back to Lam Son, the folks responsible for preparing and selecting the CH-47 loads did a pretty good job; because even though we were flying baby "C"s we still had enough power to get our job done. Third, initially they had planned to have the Chinooks remain at Khe Sanh over night. But everyone quickly learned that we were mortar magnets, so we went back to Quang Tri and Phu Bai each evening. I can honestly say that I don't remember a time when a Chinook returned from Khe Sanh for the evening that it did not have a Huey or a Cobra under it for the repair yards. Some times I'd make two trips late in the afternoon. And those ships were really shot to pieces! My heart was really with those Huey and Cobra guys!!

Fourth, many of the missions we flew in Lam Son required more than one CH-47 but we didn't really fly as a section. More like guys taking turns doing what had to be done. Naturally our C&Cs would coordinate multiple ships working on the same base. The most obvious single ship mission was aircraft recovery. I did two of them by myself in Laos. I remember one our company talked about for a while. CPT Sterling B Crawford was the A/C of a crew that recovered a rigged Huey and then the riggers' ship was shot down as it tried to leave. They rigged that one and we recovered it too! Not a bad day's work for the taxpayers. However, my most hairy mission was helping with the Ranger extraction from LZ 30. Those Rangers were some very glad looking guys when we took them out of Laos. I'd like to close by saying that you just haven't lived until you have been hot refueling at Khe Sahn when the tower announces "light to moderate incoming". The Hooks and Cranes would claw their way pretty much straight up. The Loaches buzzed off in every direction as did the lift ships. The "C" model guns, depending on how heavy with fuel and ordnance they were, would sometimes plop their way up onto the runway and dive off the cliff at the end to get going. This could sometimes be true for the AH-1Gs depending on how heavy they were. It was truly a sight to see and some how, we all missed each other in this rendition of "getting out of Dodge".

B/2/17 Cav 101 Abn lost UH-1H #68-16554 at YD948168 and crew (CW2 Richard N. Concannon, WO1 Joseph S. Burke, SGT James P. Cobb, and SP4 Zebulon M. Johnson). The sketchy details are as follows:

The aircraft was involved in a night MEDEVAC and sustained battle damage while retrieving the patient. The patient was attached to ropes hanging below the aircraft. They crashed about two miles out on a radar approach to Phu Bai.

One of the Chinook units in the 101st Abn lost CH-47C #68-15835 at YD891161 and crew (CPT Gerald P. Wick, CW2 William D. Sapp, SP6 Richard N. Brusco, CPL Larry F. Ott, and SFC Yoshio Takehara). The only thing we know about this event is that they crashed north of Phu Bai. Please report details to the VHPA.

16 Feb - As the operation continued, the realities of this type of warfare became obvious. VHPA member Cliff Whiting was TRAPS 39 with the 48th AHC and remembers:

Usually we put up ten slicks a day with support from our own gun platoon. Within weeks we lost the entire gun platoon due to ships shot up, shot down, or pilots being killed. 1LT Joe Marshall was the first 48th AHC casualty of Lam Son 719. He took a .51 cal in the head on Feb

18. Other KIA/MIA pilots from the 48th during Lam Son 719 included CPT May, CPT Bilbrey, CW2 Christman, WO1 Reid, and WO1 Sparks. The enemy fire was very intense, including flak. The "flight lead" duty rotated among three pilots - Keith Howell, Dan Grossman, and myself. The most disturbing problem I had as flight lead, was not being able to establish communications with all members of my flight of ten slicks early in the morning before takeoff from Dong Ha. Our radio technicians did the best with what they had - but communications was impossible even with three radios (VHF, UHF, and FM), I was at times not able to give commands to one, two or three aircraft in my flight. They just followed the aircraft to their front. The frustration and tragedy was when someone didn't hear the commands warning of enemy fire and consequently got hurt and/or shot down. Throughout the whole ordeal of Lam Son, there wasn't one aircraft commander in the 48th that had not been shot down at least once inside Laos. Those fortunate enough to be rescued are here to tell the story.

VHPA member P.J. Roths provides:

Being 24 and married with a college degree, I was sort of an "old man" for a new Warrant in Vietnam. When I arrived I was sort of a peace loving hippie that couldn't get assigned to a DUSTOFF unit. A combination of getting tired of being shot at, seeing too many of my friends get hurt, and being assigned to the gun platoon changed all that. For the first month or so I flew Slicks. I think the 174th lost six gunships during the first week after we started going into Laos. We hadn't changed our flying low level tactics. There were simply too many NVA with AKs pointed toward the sky. We only had a few guys killed but we lost ships and had a lot of wounded. Anyway, about 1 a.m. in February, the CO came into our tent and told me I'd be flying with the Sharks because they were so short handed. During that period I wrestled with telling my wife what was really going on or making up some story about a safe flying job in the rear. Some of the other married guys recommended I tell her the truth, which I did, and she was pretty scared for me. Hell - I was scared for me too!! Our company lived in an unfinished hospital building on Quang Tri. The EM were assigned to the building itself and the officers had tents around it. Over time we stole lumber to put in floors. We didn't receive too much incoming there. But if the hooch maids didn't show up for work in the morning, you knew it would be a good idea to stay near the bunkers. The food was terrible most of the time, so we ate Cs. A big deal for us was to get some LRRPs from the Navy. There was a hamburger joint at Eagle. It wasn't great but it was better than Cs and the mess hall. The logistical system for the area was strained to provide all the food, ammo, and fuel we needed. We went to the PX several times to buy beer - nothing. The sergeant who ran it said he really didn't have anything - but when we pressed him for "something", he mentioned that he had several cases of some French Champagne. We took 6 or 8 cases. That night we ate popcorn with this really great French Champagne in our tents! Those were the days!! The only club I can remember was at the hospital at Quang Tri. They seemed to have a pretty good supply of beer, so we spent some time there. I also remember once I'd flown a ten hour day and ended up back at Quang Tri. I was standing in the chow line when Operations came and picked a team for convoy cover. We ended up flying another six hours that evening. Near the end we were passing the controls back and forth to whomever was the most alert. We were lucky no one made a fatal mistake. I don't remember a problem with replacement aircraft. It seemed to me that within a day or two after losing a ship, we'd be told to go someplace to pick up a replacement.

Once I went to Da Nang to pick up a freshly rebuilt UH-1C, number 242. This aircraft was painted and named "Easy Rider". It had lots of power and was my personal favorite. Everyone remembers the fog and terrible weather around Khe Sanh. Many times after we were done for the day, we either need to get back to Quang Tri or didn't want to spend the night there but the fog was a problem. More than once I can remember someone in the company literally diving off the cliff and hovering down the road. If they broke out, they'd call back and the rest of us would follow. I was leading once when I met a Jolly Green coming up the road to Khe Sanh! I alerted the rest of the company and everyone successfully passed each other. Just one more hairy experience! In closing I'd like to say a word about our CO, MAJ Dale Spratt. That guy flew lead everyday he flew and he flew a lot!! He still has my respect. I wouldn't have wanted to do that.

A/101st's ORLL reports that they operated a total commitment to CCN of eight aircraft and that the first combat damage was received as Commanchero 33 and 29 were hit by shrapnel near the DMZ.

17 Feb - For those that remember the A Shau Valley and exciting places like Rendezvous and Ripcord, VHPA member Tom Marshall provides some interesting color in his book Woodstock One-Three:

Today I flew COL Rodolph (the 101st Abn Div Engineer) in a Loach on a tour of the A Shau. They are re-opening the road to the A Shau. The Big Valley is really beautiful. The former Firebase Rendezvous was located just below the eastern mountain ridge on the valley floor. As we flew in I thought of the infantrymen's poem or version of Psalm 23, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for I am the meanest guy (or words to that effect) in the valley, my M-16 is my rod and staff..." I looked at the poor guys furiously digging in at Rendezvous and couldn't believe they were going to spend the night out here. The COL had everybody working furiously. Bulldozers were digging deep bunkers, artillery registration was underway from Berchtesgaden on a mountain top overlooking them, along with the artillery bases to the north and east. Apparently there was going to be a major operation within the A Shau in the coming few days, or these guys were simply "bait". After finishing his business at Rendezvous, the COL wanted a quick tour of the valley floor. We flew up along the old Highway 548, which was still a two lane dirt road and apparently in heavy use. We observed culverts in place at small creek and drainage areas. I asked him why they were there and he said simply the NVA maintain them. We go out and blow them up now and then, but they continue rebuilding them. He then wanted to divert up to Firebase Ripcord. They had a bulldozer working on the mountain top there. I was surprised to see that because Ripcord had been closed since the preceding summer when it was evacuated. We got to Ripcord and I landed and let the COL off but kept the aircraft going at flight idle. He got out and spent several minutes talking to the people working there. They were clearing it of mines and preparing it for re-opening, should the need arise. I thought of Jim Saunders who was shot down on this very mountain six months earlier. It was an eerie feeling, sitting there fully exposed. The COL hopped back in and we departed. He pointed out a one-lane road with red clay that ran from Ripcord to the A Shau. I asked him when we had built that. He said, "We didn't build that. The NVA built that last summer and they still maintain it." That gave me a shock. Here I was in my little Loach, flying south of Ripcord, where the NVA are maintaining and occupying the land and being resupplied by truck. All this within 20 miles of Camp Eagle. Time to climb a little higher.

A/101st's ORLL reports that Commanchero 13, 11 and 33 were hit by small arms fire near the DMZ and that one aircraft was severely damaged.

18 Feb - This day would mark the beginning of the last act for RANGER NORTH. Late in the day Bureau Number 156667, a CH-53D, from HMH-463 exploded in the air and crashed northeast of Hue/Phu Bai while returning to Marble Mountain from support of Lam Son 719. The entire crew of five (MAJ Wayne R. Hyatt, 1LT Strather F. Wood, SGT Allen K. McElfresh, SGT William C. Odom Jr., and CPL Larry R. Hatter) plus three passengers (SSGT Richard T. Baker, SGT Richard A. Lillie, and SGT Gregory A. Sloat) died. Several official sources report that the aircraft had operated in Laos earlier in the day and had taken battle damage. The aircraft had landed at KILO where the battle damage was inspected and it was determined that the aircraft was safe enough to return to base. VHPA member Mike Wasko provides these details:

I was the OPSO for the squadron and remember being in our operations bunker at Marble Mountain waiting for all our birds to return. It was late at night and that aircraft was long overdue. We received word from Hue/Phu Bai that he was making a GCA when he disappeared of the glide slope but no transmissions were received. Wayne was our AMO and very qualified in the aircraft. Next morning after first light, Red Edwards, our XO, and I went up and landed near the wreckage. They had crashed into a rice paddy, so it was very difficult looking for the bodies with all the twisted metal and mud and muck. There was no fire. There is no question that they slung a blade. We found the main rotor head and all but one blade near the wreckage. After that we took off and flew all around the area looking for other parts that had come off the aircraft. You could see them from the air a lot easier than from the ground. I believe we may have found the missing blade as well.

The 237th Med Det sent a DMZ DUSTOFF to RANGER NORTH for an emergency medevac early in the morning. The crew consisted of the AC, CW2 Joseph Gordon Brown, known as Easter Bear, the other pilot was Darrel Monteith, the CE, SP5 Costello, the medic, SP5 Fujii, and a second medic, SP5 Simpco. This flight and the events that followed are mentioned on pages 128 through 136 in Into Laos and in Cook's DUSTOFF book. The following was taken from those sources:

Even though the medevac ship was escorted by two Cobras they began taking heavy ground fire about three clicks from RANGER NORTH. Apparently CW2 Brown decided it was too hot, so he cancelled the mission. The Cobras had expended and left for Khe Sanh. Then Brown changed his mind and returned to the LZ. Fujii could easily see the NVA in the brush around the LZ and they received lots of AK and 12.7mm fire on the way in. They loaded the wounded and as they lifted off, a mortar round exploded on the LZ and they came crashing back to the ground. Brown was dead and the pilot, gravely injured from shrapnel, was temporarily paralyzed from the waist down. Both Fujii and Simpco had shrapnel wounds in their backs; only Costello was not injured. Fujii and Simpco found a bunker about a hundred years from the LZ and Costello soon joined them. The mortar attack continued as a rescue Huey landed not far from their medevac ship. Somehow the pilots were loaded into the rescue Huey. Fujii was the last to leave the bunker and an explosion knocked him down. Costello and Simpco made it to the Huey. In a daze, Fujii got to his feet and waved the pilot to leave - it was just too hot to stay any longer. He returned to the bunker and found a PRC25. He radioed for all aviators to stay clear of RANGER

NORTH; the AA fire was just too strong. When the mortar attack stopped, he returned to his Huey, opened the fuel release valve and salvaged what gear he could find.

VHPA member Howard "Mo" Modjeski, DUSTOFF 13, with the 498th Med Co remembers:

I can remember in late January 1971 watching formation after formation of helicopters headed North along the coast. We were all asking, "What's going on? We've got to get into this!" Originally the 498th was requested to detach and assign two aircraft to the operation up North which were to be rotated at some unspecified (or unremembered) interval. By the end of our participation in Lam Son 719 the 498th had four or more aircraft at Khe Sanh. I got to I Corps in early February to start my participation in Lam Son 719. I can not remember if we were the second ship sent North from the 498th, or the third ship to replace someone else, but I do remember John Rauhen (Dustoff 30) had preceded me by several days and was at Khe Sanh when I arrived at the 571st Hq in Hue-Phu Bai. When we first arrived, ACs were given a local area orientation flight by either a 571st IP or AC and then an experienced copilot from the 571st or 237th to fly with for a few days until we became familiar with the area of operations. Meanwhile our copilots flew with experienced ACs from the 237th or 571st during a like period of time for their orientation. I had flown the AO from Phu Bai to Quang Tri to Khe Sanh and into Laos for several days by the time the action started at Ranger North. I remember monitoring Tac frequencies and hearing Joe Brown and Darrel Monteith getting shot down with Dennis Fujii and the first rescue attempt by Eagle Dustoff that extracted Brown, Monteith and Simcoe but left Fujii behind for four days.

C/2/17th Cav lost OH-6A #67-16528 at XD465415 and crew (WO1 Gregory S. Crandall, SGT Walter E. Lewellen, and SP4 Robert J. Engen). The sketchy details are as follows:

During a recon in Laos, the LOH was shot down, crashed and burned. The bodies were not recovered. The remains of the two EM were returned in 1991 and WO Crandall in 1993. He is now buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

1LT Joseph H. Marshall from the 48th AHC took a 51 cal in the head and died immediately during a mission in Laos.

A/101 Avn lost UH-1H #68-15255 at YC481785 and crew (WO1 George P. Berg, Commanchero 19 AC, WO1 Gerald E. Woods, pilot, SP4 Walter Demsey, CE, and SP4 Gary L. Johnson, gunner). The MIA synopsis reports:

This aircraft was dispatched as part of a flight of four on an emergency patrol extraction mission on the west side of the A Shau Valley in Thua Tin Province, Vietnam. The patrol to be rescued included CPT Ronald L. Watons, SFC Samuel Hernandez, and SGT Allen R. Lloyd, part of SOG-CCN, 5th Special Forces Group. During the attempt to recover the patrol, Woods' helicopter came under heavy fire and had to leave the PZ with Lloyd, Watson, and Hernandez attached to the three-staple rig. While in flight, the rope broke, and Hernandez fell 30-40 feet, landing in double canopy jungle. He was rescued the following day. The helicopter continued a short distance, was hit by enemy anti-aircraft fire, crashed and burned. On 19 Feb, a Special Forces recovery team was inserted at the crash site to search the area. Woods and Berg were

found dead in their seats. Johnson's body was found in a tree. One leg of Demsey, the burned CE, was found in the cargo compartment. All remains were prepared for extraction, and the team left to establish a night defensive position. En route, the team found the remains of Lloyd and Watson, still on their rope slings, in the trees on the edge of a cliff. Because of the rugged terrain and approaching darkness, the rescue team leader decided to wait until morning to recover these two remains. However, the following morning, the search team came under intense fire, and the team leader requested an emergency extraction, and in doing so, left all remains behind.

19 Feb - The NVA continued their mortar attack on RANGER NORTH and the 158th Avn Bn sent Ghost rider and C Co (Phoenix) ships to resupply it. SP5 Fujii (see 18 Feb for the beginning of this story) spent the day in the ARVN commo bunker. The land around RANGER NORTH was denuded of foliage which offered the defenders a full view of the attacking NVA. Fujii called in the coordinates of any NVA fire to the USAF FACs and became everyone hero for keeping his cool in such a dangerous situation. The strikes Fujii help coordinate and direct were especially painful to the NVA. As night fell, the NVA infantry charged the LZ. Fujii directed Army gunship and Air Force jet strikes and even killed some NVA with an M-16. The battle continued throughout the night under the light of flares and more air strikes. The 101st's ORLL for the period 19 - 22 Feb reports that the northern flank of the penetration came under heavy attack with the enemy successively concentrating his forces on the RANGER LZs and airborne objectives. Resupply to these locations was limited by intense fire on the LZs. On the 20th the 39th Ranger Battalion positions on RANGER NORTH were penetrated by the NVA. Elements of the battalion were able to reach RANGER SOUTH the next day. RANGER SOUTH and objective 31 then came under increasing enemy pressure.

SP5 Leonard A. Monnett was killed in an OH-6A in Laos while serving with some 1st Avn Bde unit. This would have to be B/7/1 Cav or C/7/17 Cav. Please report any details to the VHPA. VHPA member Steve Powers often flew in the 2/17th Cav C&C ships with the Squadron CO during these times and offers these comments:

The unfolding of this operation left memories that will always be. I remember thinking the AA must have been like this when my father flew over Germany during W.W.II, only they had a lot more of it. You could tell what was shooting at you by the way it went off and the color of the tracer. The 37's seemed to cluster together as they climbed and go off together while the 54's would climb at you and go off by themselves, one at a time. I don't remember the colors anymore but every once in awhile the smells seem to make it back. These AA memories come from the night missions we flew to keep a crew company that had been shot down and holed up around LZ 30 or LZ 31. (The sharp details of this operation and so much of that year seem to give way to some sense of undefined urgency....). Urgency was what a gun pilot named Green from A Troop must have had on his mind when he landed in a hot LZ to pull out the crew of another Cobra that had been shot down. He flew them out on his rocket pods!!! How many nights since then do you think that flight took place again? How many recalled that details of that flight could draw sweat in an instant? And how many could they even tell a story like that to? Oh the lucky ones!

A/101st's ORLL reports that Comanchero 13 received quad 14.5 fire while enroute to a CCN location and was hit. Comanchero 27 overspeeds his rotor avoiding this fire and Comanchero 14 overtorques his aircraft.

20 Feb - The ARVN on RANGER NORTH formed a tight perimeter around the command bunker where SP5 Fujii and the ARVN Bn CO directed the defense (see 18 and 19 Feb for the beginning of this story). Ten C/158 Hueys executed an ammunition, food, water resupply and emergency extraction. They had Fujii removed his shirt so he would be easier to identify. With considerable difficulty MAJ Jim Lloyd and CPT David Nelson landed on the LZ. By the time Fujii got in their Huey was on fire. They nursed it 4Ks and crashed onto RANGER SOUTH. Two C/158 slicks made it into RANGER SOUTH and got everyone out except Fujii who volunteered to try to help this unit defend its LZ.

The 48th AHC lost UH-1C #66-700 at XD562198 and crew (CW3 John E. Reid, pilot, CPT David M. May, SFC Randolph L. Johnson, and SSG Robert J. Acalotta). The MIA synopsis reports:

The UH-1C was assigned to an emergency resupply mission in Laos. The aircraft was hit by 50 caliber ground fire. When the helicopter landed, it was upright on its skids, with the tail boom broken off and the right aft burning. Witnesses stated that it was certainly a "survivable crash". Witnesses further noted that the left pilot door was jettisoned and that both forward seats were empty. There were reports that the crew may have been taken captive, particularly the pilot, John E. Reid.

Late in the evening the 498th Med Co lost UH-1H #69-15273 and crew (WO1 John V. Rauen, AC, WO1 John M. Souther, pilot, SP4 Dennis E. Gilliland, CE, and SP4 John J. Levulis. medic) just off Khe Sanh. A summary of the accident report follows:

At approximately 2150 hours, WO1 John Rauen (DUSTOFF 30) and his crew were notified of an extended mission to the west of Khe Sanh. At this time, WO1 Rauen elected to refuel his aircraft, and the tower cleared him to reposition from B-MED to POL. The aircraft was flown to POL and refueled without incident. Khe Sanh tower was again contacted and DUSTOFF 30 was cleared from POL back to B-MED. The aircraft departed to the north, and after obtaining a height of 60-80 feet, turned to a south westerly heading. Upon reaching the approach end of runway 09, the aircraft was seen to enter a fog bank which partially obscured the running lights and rotating beacon. Witnesses stated that ground fog had been moving in and out of the area causing the horizontal visibility to vary from zero-zero to unlimited. Shortly after the aircraft entered the fog, a hard turn left was observed by witnesses standing on the approach end of runway 09. Witnesses further stated they saw the aircraft losing altitude during the steep turn. No power loss or malfunction of the engine was noted. As the aircraft neared the ground, the pilot apparently realized what was happening and flared the aircraft in an attempt to decrease his rate of descent. The aircraft impacted the ground (aft left skid), descending at a rate of 650 feet per minute, (both pilot and co-pilot VSI). The aircraft continued forward, flying approximately 45 feet then made ground contact a second time where the right skid made a furrow in the ground eight feet three inches long, two feet eight inches wide, and eight inches deep. As the right skid collapsed, the main rotor blade made contact with two 55 gallon drums. The aircraft continued

forward in approximately a 30 degree right bank condition, and a nomex sleeve was torn off one of the crew members by a jagged edge from one of the two 55 gallon drums. Also at this point the head separated from the mast, and as the aircraft began to roll the tailboom separated from the main fuselage. The fuselage rolled another 250 feet leaving puddles of burning JP-4, and came to rest in the upright position facing north. The tailboom also continued forward coming to rest 90 feet northwest of the fuselage. The A/C (left seat) was completely engulfed in flames, and therefore was not removed until the first was at least partially extinguished. The pilot, WO1 John Souther, was extracted from the main fuselage with the use of a front loader. He died 26 Feb from 3rd degree burns of the head and shoulders. The Crew chief, SP4 DE Gilliland, was thrown clear of the main fuselage and landed near the tailboom, however, he died enroute from Khe Sanh to Quang Tri from 3rd degree burns over 90 percent of his body. The medic, SP4 John J. Levulis, was extracted from the right side of the cargo compartment critically burned, and died 21 Feb. The accident report seems to indicate that a Vietnamese officer was on this aircraft and that he was severally injured.

VHPA member Joel Dozhier provides some background information about the "extended mission to the west of Khe Sanh":

That evening we had been alerted for a five DUSTOFF ship mission to pick up about 100 wounded from RANGER NORTH. We were told that things were rather dire at RANGER NORTH so they planned a large horseshoe curtain of artillery to protect us. We had been flying all day and were too tired for something new and dangerous. Our suggestions that we wait until tomorrow were met with statements that there most likely wouldn't be a tomorrow for RANGER NORTH. So we planned to fly a specific sequence of headings to enter the mouth of the horseshoe. Once inside, they would move the horseshoe toward the ARVN base. When DUSTOFF 30 crashed, we dispatched another ship to carry them to coast. With only three ships remaining, MED CONTROL ordered up another replacement ship. About the time he arrived and was briefed, we were told that RANGER NORTH had been evacuated so the mission was canceled.

VHPA member Howard "Mo" Modjeski provides some additional information:

My recollection of the mission the night John Rauen was killed differs only slightly from Joel Dozhier's. The pick up site was not RANGER NORTH (where Dennis Fujii was still heroically "directing traffic") The pick up was about 30 klicks south of Highway 9 on a road that ran south from Highway 9 about half way between Khe Sanh and Xepon. They had all the Dustoff and gunship crews participating in the mission fly over to a TOC between Lang Vei and Bach Son for a mission briefing. Joel was otherwise correct, the situation was desperate, a joint Air Force/Army operation was planned to extract a surrounded ARVN element. The operation was to be replete with Air Force AC-130 flare and gunships, fast mover Tac Air support, helicopter gunships and five Dustoff aircraft flying a specific sequence of headings to enter the mouth of a horseshoe from the southeast to the northwest under covering fire to extract this ARVN element. When the briefing ended, we all flew to POL to topoff before the mission started. After refueling, all the Dustoff ships repositioned to the B-Med pad at the southwest side of Khe Sanh to unit brief and await the start of the mission. Low ceilings and scud had already started moving in and promised to make the evenings operations challenging for everyone. I had already

refueled, repositioned to B-Med, and was shutting down the engine when there was a flash of light and a huge corona of light in the direction of the main runway. It looked like ground flares. The main rotor had almost stopped and I was about to turn off the radios when Khe Sanh tower called "Mayday, Dustoff has crashed on runway 09!"

Before we could get cranked and to operational RPM a Dustoff aircraft (Dustoff 507, my recollection is not clear) called short final to the crash. I recognized the voice, it was Dave Borrell one of the 498th copilots flying with one of the 571st ACs. I was very upset we at B-Med could not get to John soon enough. Dave told me later that they touched down seconds after John crashed and there was nothing we could have done. Dave and his 571st AC flew John Souther and John Levulis (copilot and medic) to Quang Tri. They died days later from burns. Contrary to the accident account, my recollection was Dennis Gilliland died on site with John Rauen. I had to identify the bodies. They had put out the fire by pushing earth over the burning wreckage with a front loader because there was not yet adequate fire equipment. Presumably it was the same front loader that extracted John Souther. John Rauen was still in the left seat, only charred remains, I could only tell it was him from the shape of his head in the helmet. John was a flight school class mate of mine and a good friend. I thought we found Gilliland partially buried in the cabin behind Rauen, I distinctly remember his round wire rim glasses. Burns and being killed outright were about the only injuries fast evacuation and the excellent surgeons could not save. I know what the accident report says but I had flown with John many, many times at night and in bad weather. I don't believe John got vertigo or anything like that. I believe there was something wrong with the aircraft. About two months later we got aircraft with crash worthy fuel cells. If John's ship would have been fitted with a crash worthy fuel cell, I think all four of the crew would have been alive today. I remember the mission finally being canceled due to deteriorating weather the majority of gunships were not equipped to fly in, and the reduced number of Dustoff aircraft available for the mission.

D/3/5 Cav lost an AH-1G at XD695494 and crew (1LT John C. Hunter, AC, and WO1 Carl Nacca, pilot). The sketchy details are as follows:

Hunter was Charlie Horse 42. They rolled in on a 14.5 AAA position after a scout aircraft received fire. The Cobra took hits and caught fire at 500 feet AGL. It crashed hard and burned. Please report details to the VHPA.

A/101st's ORLL reports that Comanchero 12 and 33 perform a tactical urgent extraction of a CCN team, that 33 receives RPG fire in the PZ, and his CE was WIA.

21 Feb - About 200 men from the 39th ARVN Rangers fought their way out of RANGER NORTH (leaving about 130 dead and 60 wounded) and moved to RANGER SOUTH. SP5 Fujii (see 18 - 20 Feb for the beginning of this story) was still on RANGER SOUTH directing strikes against the NVA. Again Hueys from the 158th Avn Bn conducted resupply/medevac operations. The 174 AHC lost UH-1C #66-15161 at XD583284. VHPA member Gary Harter remembers this with special clarity:

Charlie models had two well known problems that were magnified during Lam Son 719 - because of the high DA we could only carry about 45 minutes worth of fuel if we were fully

loaded with ordnance and we flew slower than the Hotels and Snakes. While the majority of our missions were to cover our own lift ships, we often given short escort DUSTOFF missions. Most everyone talks about refueling at Khe Sanh but Charlie models habitually grabbed fuel at Lang Vei - we wouldn't make it to Khe Sanh. On this day Fred Thompson and I were flying together as wing for CPT Souder and WO Bruce Marshall in the lead Shark gunship. All Shark gunships were painted with wide set of teeth that started just aft of the pilot doors. I guess you could say that our CEs took nose art to the max! Each ship had a name; Souder and Marshall were flying "Surfer Girl" that day. We launched to provide escort for a single DUSTOFF ship that I later learned was flown by Howard "Mo" Modjeski. His mission was to go deep into Base Area 604 to get some ARVN wounded. He lead out because he knew exactly where we were going; then Souder and Bruce and finally our ship. We had just passed over a ridge south and east of FSBs BRICK and DON when we watched in amazement as the lead UH-1C took at least ten maybe fifteen hits. Bruce called out that they were taking fire from 3 o'clock, 6 o'clock, and 9 o'clock. We could easily see the big flashes hit the ship and pieces flying off. Souder radioed that Bruce was wounded and that they were going down. They made a forced landing in a grassy area adjacent to QL92, a narrow north-south road that departed QL9 just west of ALOUI. I alerted "Mo" who seemed to be flying away! We made several firing passes and orbits around the downed ship before we decided to land near them. I distinctly remember seeing a rusted truck on one side of the road and lots of spider holes along the road. Just before I landed in a bomb crater we blew the rocket pods because I knew we'd have a devil of a time getting out of that confined area. Fred and Bob Wilder, our CE, jumped out and started running toward the downed ship. I was on the radio calling for "Mo". He turned around and used FM homing to get back to us. Fred and Bob came back in a few minutes, the vegetation was just too thick for them to get to the other ship. We staggered out of that bomb crater and the most beautiful sight of all greeted us about a quarter mile ahead - the DUSTOFF ship!! In no time, they are over the downed ship. We must have looked ridiculous to the NVA, no rocket pods and our mini-guns just hanging on the sides by their ammo shuts! Fred and I were and still are best friends but we'd argue like mad with each other when we flew together. Maybe that kept us sharp and alive, I don't know. Anyway, that day Fred's taking pictures of the DUSTOFF over the downed Shark. The DUSTOFF guys picked up everyone. Bruce had been hit in both legs. His wounds were very serious and he was evacuated back to the States. As we departed the area, I told the DUSTOFF that I was returning low level - I was just tired of being a target. He said "See Ya" and climbed for altitude. During the next day or so there was some discussion about trying to recover "Surfer Girl". It was my opinion that it wasn't worth risking anyone to recover it because the battle damage had been extensive and for sure the NVA had been able to get to the aircraft. About two days later they put an Arch Light through that section which destroyed the aircraft.

VHPA member Howard "Mo" Modjeski remembers the mission this way:

Operations gave us the frequency and call sign of the Charlie model gunships assigned to the mission but I had no idea who it was until we made initial contact. You have to understand Fred Thompson was the original Southern California Surfer snatched off a surf board and thrown into flight school at a very tender age. He still talked like he was on the beach even in the middle of a war. To this day he still says, "Bitchin!" I recognized Fred's voice upon initial contact. I remember asking if it was Fred, he confirmed and I told him I was Mo. Bruce came on the air and we had a great little flight school reunion. I was blessed to fly most, if not all, of my time on

Lam Son 719 with the crew of Mike Basler-Crew Chief and Mike Morris-Medic, on the "Iron Butterfly". I have forgotten the aircraft serial number. I am embarrassed to admit I cannot remember who our copilot was on this mission. Dave Borrell flew with us most of the time in Laos, but I know he was still flying with a 571st AC the night before. We probably still had a 571st copilot with us on this date but I do not remember his name. Mike Morris is one of the most gifted and dedicated Medics I ever had the privilege to fly with. I've seen Morris pick up a half dozen patients in the middle of the night, and in a ten minute ride back to an aid station, dress wounds on every patient, start three IV's in the dark in the back of a bouncing helicopter and give artificial respiration to one of the patients. If Morris did not become a doctor, society missed out on a real talent. Some may recognize the name Basler. Mike Basler's father founded a company called Basler Airlines of Osh Kosh, Wisc. The company rebuilds DC-3s and converts them to turbo prop power. Mike Basler must have learned quite a bit from his father because the Iron Butterfly was the oldest and seemingly weakest bird in the 498th. It always took four or five extra lbs. of torque to hover or cruise compared to other ships in the unit, hence the nose art and name Iron Butterfly. That was the bad news. The good news was Basler's magic insured the Iron Butterfly would always reach down and find some extra N1 to pull out a heavy load in high DA, and despite being shot at hourly in Laos we rarely took hits. In fact no one was ever injured crewing this ship during my tenure with the unit.

The mission was to pick up some urgently classified patients down in the same area as the canceled mission of the previous night. We led the flight of three and were about ten miles south of QL9 when Mike Morris announced on the intercom that we and the gunships were taking fire from six o'clock. We were in an empty H-Model and broke left so we could accomplish a high speed descent without building the rotor RPM. I remember as we broke Mike Morris came on the intercom again and said, "Protect the family jewels!". I turned around to look and Morris was shoving a padded quarter inch steel plate under his fanny for protection. I thought this was uproariously funny until a couple of minutes later. Bruce and Fred broke right in their loaded Charlie Models to keep the rotor RPM from decaying. About the time we got down on the deck, Fred came up on UHF-Guard and called Mayday, that Bruce had been shot down. I called Fred on UHF and asked him to give me a long count on the FM frequency. Fred complied and we proceeded to home to Fred with the FM homer and all the speed the old Iron Butterfly would give us. Just as Fred's long count was about to end we came over a hill where the 51 cal's that shot up Bruce were located. They were shooting away from us at Bruce and Fred when we first came over the hill. When they finally heard us they tried to turn our way but just then we went by them. By the time they turned around again to track us we were down range and tracers went by but we took no hits. The Iron Butterfly protects those that fly her! Bruce went down in a little valley of bamboo east of the hill the 51 cal's were. Fortunately there was a small knoll between the gun emplacements and the ravine where Bruce landed. This knoll prevented the 51 cal's from a direct line of fire on Bruce.

I think air crews in general were exceptionally good at keeping their wits about them under fire. But I think we all have to admit when a fellow airmen went down there was an extra effort and tension that developed that pushed us all to the ragged edge, to rescue our downed brother. When we came upon Bruce I can remember only wanting to land to extract him. I was very excited and could not let a fellow airmen, let alone a flight school classmate, be trapped on the ground hurt. I had lost one flight school classmate (John Rauen) the night before and I was

determine not to lose another one. We had cut down trees with the main rotor on a Huey some six inches in diameter to get into an LZ, but you could not cut any thickness of bamboo without tearing the honeycomb out of the main rotor blades and creating an imbalance that would destroy the aircraft. I was on my way in to land next to Bruce when Basler called the bamboo. I can remember our Medic, Mike Morris, coming on the intercom and saying, "alright, everyone settle down!" Mike could sense we were all overly excited. With that we all settled down and coordinated the process of hoisting Bruce and his crew out of the landing site in a very business like fashion. We came to a hover over the downed Charlie Model and started the hoist down for the first of three hoists. The downed crew came up 1-2-1 on the hoist. They sent Bruce up first. When I first saw him I thought he would surely lose his leg. He had taken a 51 caliber through the thigh and the leg had swollen up to more than twice its normal size. Fred Thompson, Gary Harter, and their crew were the REAL HEROs that day. By the time we had arrived I had not realized they had made an attempt to extract Bruce and his crew. Once over the downed aircraft our main rotor seemed just high enough to be right in the line of fire from the 51 caliber position. The green tracers looked like they were coming right through the rotor plane. I asked for covering fire while we hoisted Bruce and his crew out of the LZ. I did not know that Fred and Gary had punched off their rockets and Mini-guns in order to try and land and reach Bruce before we had arrived on the scene. Once we set to the task of hoisting out Bruce, Fred and Gary started flying a harassment pattern to draw fire from the 51 cal positions. They only had M60 door guns! What a Hell of a Fake! They drew all the fire. Fred finally called me about the third time we sent the hoist down and said, "Mo, we're out of ammo; we're going to start taking pictures, man!" Once we got everyone in the aircraft we departed the right behind Fred and Gary. I know Gary thought we went high, but we were right behind him and we didn't think he was low or fast enough all the way back to the border!

22 Feb - VHPA member Joel Dozhier provides some details about an unusual DUSTOFF mission that happened during Lam Son 719.

Periodically DMZ DUSTOFF received missions from a control with the call sign KING. I can only assume KING was some sort of USAF AWAC type ship. They would suddenly come up on our push and whenever they used their call sign KING, the word would reverberate. We all said it was as if God was calling us - KIINNNGGG! This KING must have had about 9 million radios because he was forever asking us to tune to something and do something we didn't have. There was a KING 24 and a KING 29. Sometimes they'd get frustrated with us and ask what we had. We'd tell them we have an FM and a UHF and that is all. Anyway, on this day KING wanted us to go a "little ways to the north". They wanted to give us a coordinates in codes and asked us to do something I'd guess only Air Force guys understood. Well, we couldn't do that. Then they wanted to shackle us the coordinates based on some SIO totally unknown to us. Finally, we said - maybe you'd just better give it to us now. So they did. We looked at everything we had in the ship and told them: "Hay, our maps don't go that far north". They said - OK, fly to this point and we'll give you headings and distances from there. They wanted us to pick up the two pilots from an Australian B57 that had gone down. By the time we got into their general area, there was a solid ceiling that covered the tops of the ridges. We told KING things were pretty dicey and he said that the guys on the ground could hear us but they were on the other side of a ridge line. We flew to the ridge, then hovered up, over, and down through the soup. Jerry Graff was the CE that day. He was a big, big help during that hovering exercise. Finally, KING

told us to tune the guys on the ground. We told him that if we tuned to them, then we couldn't talk to him anymore and asked him not to go away. We didn't have a clue where we were and needed KING to help us get back home. After a few minutes, we found the first pilot and he knew where the other one was. I believe the second pilot was hurt and that we had to send one of our guys down to help him get on the hoist. With them on board, we got back to KING and said "How do we get home?" We did what he said and ended up at Vandegrift with the fuel warning light on. One of the Australian pilots was Allen Pinches. I wrote him a few times after the war. The Australians sent us a unit plaque and thank you notes. That was a very satisfying mission that turned out well for everyone.

23 Feb - The 101st Div's ORLL for the period 23 Feb - 2 Mar states that the ARVN were getting ready to regain the initiative and continue their drive west. Elements of the 3d Regt, 1st ARVN Inf Div and accompanying artillery were extracted from FB HOTEL II and air assaulted into FB DETLA I and from LZ GREEN into LZ BROWN. The force on LZ WHITE was extracted. As mentioned earlier, HMMH-463 provided four CH-53D Sea Stallions each day and they were generally responsible for moving the ARVN 155mm guns and heavy lift support for the FSBs south of Route 9. Because of heavy pressure from the NVA, the ARVNs decided to evacuate HOTEL II. The HMMH-463 ships had spend most of the day lifting the guns from HOTEL II. Enemy machine guns and mortars fired at HOTEL II and any helicopter trying to land there all during the day. VHPA member Mike Wasko provides the following:

I was the flight leader that day and the HAC in that aircraft. LTC Charlie Pitkin was the H2P pilot. He had been serving with the MAG and was flying with me to get checked out in the aircraft prior to assuming command of the squadron. About dusk we came to a hover over HOTEL II to hook another artillery piece when several mortar shells exploded nearby. I distinctly remember that the crew chief was having trouble with the ARVN rigger. He wouldn't stand up on the tube to help with the hook-up because he didn't want to expose himself to the enemy fire. As a result, we had to hover very low. I was busy working with the aircraft and listening to the crew chief. You should also remember that the 53 is a huge airplane and with all the dust in those zones, we could have been taking a lot of fire and I wouldn't have known it unless another helicopter told us or one of the guys in the back saw something. Suddenly smoke starts coming in the cockpit and I hear and see that something is wrong with Charlie. He was hit in the left leg by a 51-cal but was still alert. I remember the stick was frozen and looking at the PC1 and PC2 hydraulic pressure guages - both had gone to zero. I knew, at that point, I had virtually no control over the aircraft. I don't know if I landed on the tube or not, but the airplane just dropped. It didn't roll over. I pulled off the throttles and hit the rotor break. The 53 had a nasty tendency to bring blades through the cockpit when you banged it down hard and I remember being a little surprised that we hadn't been hit in the head yet. All this took a little time and then I became concerned about the guys in the back. I moved out of the cockpit through the fuselage. I saw the crew chief but the gunners were already out and running across the zone. We all knew that the bird was quickly becoming the target of choice for every NVA gun and mortar tube within range. CPT Bob Wemheuer, in another Sea Stallion, couldn't land near us but came to a hover and lowered their extraction ladder.

Within a few minutes, the three EM from my ship attracted themselves of the ladder and Wemheuer flew away. I remember thinking - good, they are safe and someone will come get us

pretty soon. I don't know how Charlie got out of the cockpit but I do remember helping drag him away from the aircraft. There were no ARVN in sight. They were underground and I didn't blame them. I am certain the downed aircraft just added to their problems. There was a lot of thumping going on. I think it is safe to say that it was raining mortar rounds. I don't believe Charlie received any medical attention there. Eventually I got an ARVN PRC25 and started talking to MAJ Klose in the C&C bird. It was getting dark and that was good because the NVA couldn't adjust their fire anymore. Soon MAJ Klose landed in this Army Huey and evacuated us. I was very glad to get in that aircraft and leave the place! Charlie was evaced to the States but still had a great career because he retired as a LTG. This was my second tour flying CH-53Ds with HMH-463 in Vietnam. Prior to Lam Son 719 the Marines were pulling out of Vietnam and at this point our squadron had many first tour pilots, mostly 1LTs. Most of our senior 53 pilots were already in Hawaii or Okinawa. I felt responsible to make certain the missions were performed well and that no one would get hurt. So the squadron XO, Red Edwards, and I took turns taking the Lam Son support assigned. We also coordinated our missions with the battalion commander of the 159th ASBN who gave us our assignments. I certainly believe this operation was in a class by itself. It was some of the most difficult and challenging flying we had ever done. I am all for accomplishing the mission and I can't think of a mission that the Army could have given us during Lam Son 719 that I would not have done immediately. However, there were some very questionable things going on. After we had made dozens of attempts to get an artillery piece or a wrecked helicopter only to bring it back and have it scrapped; well, maybe it wasn't worth all those risks just to be able to say "we retrieved all the equipment". We could have simply destroyed it with a bomb. Lam Son 719 was also different because we really couldn't trust what the ARVN were telling us. Prior to this time, we'd worked with ARVN units accompanied by U.S. advisors and we had the feeling that they would tell us the truth. The ARVN would say - "no we haven't received any incoming all day", yet you could see the puffs of dust being kicked up by the mortars. I've sent some time talking with Marine A4 pilots and they agree that the Route 9 valley was some of the best defended territory in southeast asia. I remember hauling a bulldozer back and watching the flak come up after us. It seemed to me that the NVA flak crews were more accustomed to shooting at jets than helicopters and that this gave helicopters an ever so small advantage. It was my impression that the NVA ringed their flak positions with three 51 cal's and that it was the 51 cal's that ate us up.

Now we hear from VHPA member Charley Love who describes the events from a Marine escort gunship point of view:

I flew as the lead of second Cobra gunship section that escorted the Sea Stallions over HOTEL II. HML-367 had a standing commitment to provide either two or four sections of two AH-1Gs to cover the CH-53Ds. We were based at Marble Mountain and would fly up each morning, refuel at Khe Sanh, then move to KILO to wait for the 53s to leave on their missions. My general impression is that it was very difficult for gun pilots to know "who was on first and who was on second" most of the time. We knew the big picture and if an ARVN infantry unit was moving from one point to another, OK; but detailed coordination was difficult. The NVA infantry quickly adopted the practice of "hugging" the ARVN's bases so we couldn't put the big stuff in on them. Many times the gunships were really all that use available to hit in NVA. It seemed that even the Army C&Cs were not all that certain where the friendlies were. We adopted a policy - if they shoot at you or the 53s then it was OK to shoot at them. It wasn't the

best, but we had to do something. I believe the ARVN had two 155s and four 105s plus some ammo on HOTEL II that they wanted moved to another base. We had tried a couple of times during the morning but the NVA mortar fire was just strong enough and quick enough to prevent much success. I can distinctly remember Mike Wasko's ship going in for the load. We were in our daisy chains working on the most obvious flashes of enemy fire. I'd guess it was just bad luck when a mortar round finally went off close enough to really hurt him. Naturally knowing he was down heightened our adrenaline levels which were hardly low to begin with! I don't remember the second CH-53D going in to get the crew of the downed ship, we were that busy. I believe they spiked those guns figuring they were cheaper to replace than risking another 53. Some of the other things that come to mind about those days - rearming and refueling at Khe Sanh wasn't a problem. It was neat that someone had already broken down the ammo for us and assembled the rockets. Later in the battle, when we started seeing NVA armor in numbers also "hugging" the ARVN bases, I was really frustrated because we didn't have any anti-tank ordnance for our 2.75" rockets. One of our sister Marine Corps Cobra units flew from ships just off the DMZ with 5" rockets; but we didn't have any in Laos while I was there.

The 173rd AHC lost UH-1H #67-19516 and crew (1LT Dennis C. Farris, 1LT Terry M. Usher, SP4 John W. Bruin, and SP4 Terrance A. Ogata) and UH-1C #65-09503 and crew (CW2 James A. Miner, WO1 Roy Y. Shinkawa, SP5 James E. Barton, and SP4 Charles R. Hausherr) in a mid-air while working near an LZ in Laos. Please report details to the VHPA.

D/3/5 Cav lost an OH-6A and CW2 Stephen M. Hiscock died. The sketchy details are as follows:

While on a scout mission on the Laos border with Vietnam, the LOH took fire from a large enemy force. The pilot tried to stretch the autorotation but ran out of RPM, crashed and burned. Please report details to the VHPA.

SGT Raymond L. Armentrout died in Laos but the VHPA has no details about his unit or the circumstances that lead to his death. It is certainly possible that Armentrout was in the LOH with CW2 Hiscock. Please report details to the VHPA.

24 Feb - VHPA member Howard "Mo" Modjeski remembers receiving some special instructions in this manner:

In late February Joel Dozhier, Dustoff 713, and my crew were flying out of Khe Sanh under the control of Khe Sanh Dustoff. There were more missions than we had ships and crews. I can remember having missions backed up three and four deep, while we flew down to dusk. To add to the problem, gunship cover was becoming difficult to come by. We got tired of waiting for gun cover to be assigned through operations. Joel and I teamed up to fly missions covering each other. Since we could not get gun cover, at least we could look after each other. We would go out into Laos in tandem. One of us would fly high cover while the other picked up patients until we were full. Then the other would fly cover while the second ship picked up patients. At least if one of us was shot down, the other would be there to come in and get the other.

One day we returned to Khe Sanh at last light. We refueled the aircraft and returned to the B-Med pad. While we were sitting at flight idle letting the EGT stabilize, I recall seeing a jeep with

two big MP's sitting at the top of the pad. As I reached to shut off the fuel and shut down the bird, the MP's heard the aircraft shutting down and started toward the each of our aircraft. This guy was the biggest MP I ever saw while I was in the military. He had to be 6' 5" and 250lbs.. He got to my cockpit door, and I keyed the intercom mic so I could hear him speak. He asked if I was Dustoff 13. I acknowledged being the same. He asked that I come with him. "Who Me!?" "Yes Sir." "OK." I looked over and the same conversation seemed to be taking place with the other MP and Joel Dozhier. Joel's MP wasn't any smaller than mine. Joel and I, in those days, although tall, weighed maybe 165 lbs. soaking wet. We were not going to argue with these guys. Once the aircraft were shut down we climbed in a jeep with the MPs and drove to a TOC in the middle of the Khe Sanh compound. There we were introduced to General Berry, the commander of the Lam Som 719 operation. The General was typical Airborne. White walled crew haircut and starched jungle fatigues with a crease so sharp it would slice steak. The General promptly proceeded to lock our heels and chew Joel and I a new backside for flying into Laos without gun cover! "But, but, but, General, we couldn't get gun cover through channels, and there were more missions than ships to extract the patients." I believe the General's next words were something to the effect of, "You will not go into Laos without gun cover. DO YOU UNDERSTAND, MISTER?!". "Yes Sir!" General Berry proceeded to assure us we would have adequate gun cover available in the future. In the event we were not able to get a gunship assignment through normal Dustoff channels he gave us a special frequency and a Call Sign to contact. Business complete, General Berry invited us over to assist updating his tactical maps of the operation. I remember being surprised at how poor and old the information was about element locations and especially enemy gun emplacements. Joel and I spent a good amount of time correcting enemy gun locations and identifying the correct location of ground elements we had flown missions for that day. There was a definitive change from that day forward. Gunship coverage was available with almost every mission. I can only remember one time not being able to get a gunship assignment in a timely fashion after our meeting with the General. With much trepidation I dialed up the General's frequency and Call Sign. An RTO answered and asked me to stand-by after my initial contact. Next the General came on (I remembered his voice) and asked about the problem. We explained there were no gunships available, per Dustoff operations, for 40 minutes. He asked about our location. We advised we were in POL. Maybe sixty seconds passed before the General came back on the push and advised there were two gunships behind us in POL. He gave us the call sign and frequency to contact them. By the time we contacted them on the frequency they had been assigned to us. From that day forward I was never short of gun cover in Laos.

25 Feb - The ARVN Ranger Battalions were extracted from RANGER SOUTH and LZ 31 was overrun. The ARVN armored TF attacked north to relieve pressure on the airborne and to reinforce them. However, they were ambushed and halted in place. They would remain in the area north and east of ALOUI for several days. Not only did the NVA pummel them but the American air support that tried and tried to help them suffered a lot. The USMC formal history for the period states:

HMH-463 made one last attempt to salvage the Sea Stallion shot down on HOTEL II on the 23rd. CPT Henry Cipolla, a maintenance officer, and Gunnery Sergeant Ron Severson, a line chief, volunteered to inspect the downed ship. Although HOTEL II and the surrounding area were still under enemy fire, the two Marines were inserted some distance away and worked their

way to the ship. They found that it could not be repaired where it was; it had 500-700 shrapnel holes in the rotors, engines, and fuselage plus major airframe damage. Cipolla and Severson stripped the hulk of weapons and coding equipment. On the way back to their PZ, they helped evacuate four wounded ARVN before they were extracted. Within a day or so, an air strike destroyed the wreck.

SP4 Edward A. Johnson from C/7/17th Cav died from injuries received in Laos. VHPA member Dave Ferrell, who flew for C/7/17th Cav, gives us a good picture of this period:

I think I was C Troop's first new pilot after they moved up north to support Lam Son 719. I was processed through Dong Ha by the 223d 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 Pusher. I didn't have any TA-50 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! About the 25th of Feb, I got to Khe Sanh and my first day there was hardly uneventful. 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 First 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. 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 he 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 on the north side of 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 "6"s found some hootches 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 "6"s and the C&C; so we left the "6"s there and flew toward 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 Son, 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 small arms fire! 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 waved us off. We head back for Khe Sanh. Later I learn that they replaced Dave Nelson, the front seat in the Snake, the wounded C&C pilot and the Snake medevaced him. He was the Gun Platoon Leader at the time; just flying C&C that 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 though 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!

The 174th AHC had a UH-1 crash and burn near LZ Scotch at XD934585. WO1 Steven R. Burch and WO1 Patrick D. Erb died in this crash. Burch was evacuated to Japan but died on 5 March of pneumonia. Erb was also evacuated to Japan and died on 15 March of pneumonia. The names and fate of the EM and the aircraft are not known. Please report details to the VHPA.

26 Feb - Near the end of the day, the 48th AHC received an emergency resupply mission. VHPA member Jesse Dize provided a copy of the Award of the Air Medal for Heroism order that lists the five slick and two gunship pilots that flew this mission. He provides the following account:

The resupply was for a unit that was in heavy contact and running out of ammunition. This unit was not one that we normally supported. We heard that because of the heavy enemy fire, the other unit couldn't or wouldn't deliver the critical ammo. For one thing there was no place to land. We agreed to deliver the ammo if we could use slings. Even though our inflight airspeed would be slower our exposure time would be greatly reduced. If worst case to worst we could also drop the load on the run. At tree top level and with eighty knots airspeed, the load would hit the ground on target if it was released when the target was seen between the pilot's pedals. This was a tactic we used with great success when working with the Koreans in II Corps. It was getting dark on a clear night when arrived in the area of the LZ. We decided to orbit with one slick at a time delivering its load. We also decided that each aircraft would approach the LZ from a different direction and that the gunships would direct and time sequence the rest of us. I was the last aircraft to make the supply run. By now the Bad Guys had figured out what we were doing. It was the edge of dark and the glow on the western horizon was starting to die out. As I closed in on the target area, the tree line to my left started to sparkle. I told Mike to "go hot" and told the guns where the fire was coming from. My copilot and platoon leader told Mike to stop shooting because it might be friendly fire. When we shut down after the mission, oil drained out of a bullet hole in the blade grip. The "Old Dog" had an additional 17 holes that weren't there before the mission. So much for friendly fire! See the attached citation for details. However, we didn't hover!

27 Feb - An airborne battalion air assaulted onto FB ALPHA. The ARVN 17th Cavalry was sent north from the ARVN 1st Armored Bde to counteract LZ 31. They were augmented by some ARVN Airborne troops and gathered many from LZ 31. They got to within a couple hundred meters of LZ 31 and then pulled back. VHPA member Howard "Mo" Modjeski remembers these times as follows:

Dave Borrell, a 498th Med copilot, joined Mike Morris-Medic, Mike Basler-Crew Chief, and myself on the Iron Butterfly. At last, we had a complete 498th crew. Dave had been flying a lot of back hauls with a 571st AC learning the AO between Khe Sanh and Quang Tri/ Hue Phu Bai but had not gone much beyond Khe Sanh. The Iron Butterfly team had been successful getting a lot of first up missions into Laos. We ended up giving Dave his first steady diet of Laos flying. One of the first missions was a pick up north of QL9 near Hill 31. We went to great lengths to take indirect routes and use the terrain to mask our approaches to LZ's in order to fool the mortar crews. This LZ was on the side of a south facing slope that had been cleared. A couple of deep ravines offered cover for an approach from the east. As we turned the corner in one of the ravines we started taking some small arms fire. Dave called, "Taking fire four o'clock". I replied, "Yea, no sweat" and kept on truckin with evasive maneuvers. Dave later told me he thought I had gone over the edge at the time. Forty eight hours later after taking fire on most missions into Laos Dave became equally matter of fact. It is still hard to understand how we all grew accustomed to that environment! We got to the LZ and the ground element had a cute little ARVN with a set of direction wands indicating where he wanted us to set down. I no sooner put the skids on the ground, fascinated by the ARVN with the wands, when I looked down through my chin bubble into the face of a Claymore Mine. "THIS SIDE TOWARD ENEMY" Right next to the guy with the wands was another ARVN with a PRC 25 FM radio chatting away. I recalled nearby FM broadcasts would sometime set off Claymores and they landed us in a field of Claymores. We couldn't transmit to the RTO because our FM antennae was even closer to the

Claymores. I remember wishing we could get the guy with the PRC 25 and stick the mic where the sun don't shine. In the meantime Morris had loaded the so called urgent patients; two ambulatory ARVN with minor flesh wounds and six KIAs. It was the classic example of our cultural differences with the Vietnamese people. It was very important for them to be buried with their ancestors, so they were inclined to evacuate the dead before the wounded. Our priorities were built around evacuating the wounded that were savable. KIAs were not worth risking live crews to evacuate. This culture clash would last throughout our involvement with the country.

B/7/1 Cav lost OH-6A #67-16256 at XD625208 and crew (LT Ronald Babcock, pilot, and PSG Fred Mooney, observer). The MIA synopsis reports:

The Bravo Dutchmasters were airborne over Laos, their pink teams doing low-level scouting in the AO of the ARVN 1st Infantry Division. LT Ronald Babcock was flying one of the OH-6A Loaches and his door-gunner/observer, Fred Mooney was the scout platoon sergeant. A man in his forties, Mooney was not required to fly, but he volunteered to show the young draftees that old lifers could be as tough as they were. Skimming low over the trees, the Loach was hit by NVA fire, and Babcock radioed that they were going down. The Command and Control ship chased after the descending ship and observed the Loach crash on a dirt road. Mooney and Babcock jumped out and ran across a grassy clearing, whereupon they were cut down by North Vietnamese in the treeline. The C&C ship commander dropped to a ten foot hover and called on the radio that, from their appearance, the two were dead. They were first listed MIA, but status was changed without tangible evidence to Killed/Body Not Recovered in less than a year. Fred Mooney's tour was to be over in May and his plans were to return to Killeen, Texas and continue his life with his wife and four children. Ron Babcock graduated from college with a degree in forestry and was anxious to get home and get on with his career.

VHPA member Dave Ferrell, who flew for C/7/17th Cav, provides a few more details to help us understand the conditions at the time.

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 Cav, 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 Son 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!

28 Feb - VHPA member Doug Womack describes the events as follows:

I was flight lead for the 71st on what I think was the second lift for the extraction from 30 or 31. For whatever reason, the first lift tried three times to get in. They never sent us in. I had my flight in a holding pattern at 7,000 south of the river. Even at that altitude we had green basketballs coming through the flight. I heard that the commander of the first lift had been shot down three times and had two pilot pilots killed. I remember after the third attempt, one of their pilots came over the air. You could tell he was crying when he told the C&C "If you people don't get your s#%t together, nobody is going back in there!" The C&C cancelled the extraction at that point.

1LT Morris A. Simpson of C/2/17th CAV was killed while flying an OH-6A in Laos. The sketchy details are as follows:

Simpson took ten bullets in the head and died. The observer, who was not a pilot, flew the helicopter back to safety. The story was written up in the March issue of Time Magazine.

C/158th AHB was supporting operations around RANGER SOUTH. David Nelson and crew were shutdown. Don Davis and his crew would rescue the downed crew but got some extremely brave assistance from Skip Butler of D/158 in an AH-1G. Skip had expended all his ordnance on the 51 cal position that had shutdown Nelson down and was given Davis considerable grief. Don said he only needed a few more seconds to get in, so Skip set up for a final run at the 51 cal without anything to shoot. The NVA were distracted by attacking Cobra and let Don's UH-1H alone long enough for them to get in to their downed companions.

1 Mar - The 101st Div's ORLL states the 1st ARVN Inf Div forces on the extreme southern flank continued to be under heavy pressure until withdrawn on 1 Mar. Two USAF helicopter pilots, MAJ Milton H. Ramsey and CPT Albert Tijerina, were killed in Laos due to hostile fire. The VHPA does not have any information about the events that lead to their death and these events may or may not have anything to do with Lam Son 719. Please report details to the VHPA. A/101st ORLL states that the Comancheros began support the 1st ARVN in Laos. Five ships support the insertion of DELTA ONE and BROWN. Five aircraft resupply LZ 30 and units to the south of LZ 31. Comanchero 17 and 31 are hit by 12.7 mm fire. One aircraft, Comanchero 40, RONs with flares and three others are on stand-by. The company sets up an advanced CP on the Lagger Pad, a large cleared area on the southeastern end of the end active runway. A GP medium tent is pitched and two PRC-25 radios installed. Aircraft parts, a TI, a rigger and one NCO run this show.

2 Mar - The 101st Div's ORLL states that an airborne battalion was inserted at FB ALPHA to secure the Route 9 is held open for the ARVN forces working in Laos. PFC Keith D. Heffner died at YD313857 while assigned to the 1st Avn Bde. Please report details to the VHPA. VHPA member Dale McClure, from the 48th AHC, remembers:

I have so many memories of this operation; they are just a string of "That Days". That day a slick pilot reported air bursts to the C&C ship flying at 10,000 feet. The Colonel said, "Young man you have watched too many WWII movies. There is nothing out here like that." Then about two minutes later the Colonel reported an air burst and advised that every one should return to Khe Sanh. That day we inserted troops into a hot LZ just after the B-52s hit. Smoke from the bombs filled the area, but the NVA quickly emerged to fill the air with bullets. I thought that these little guys really have a cause to go through an Arc Light attack and to come out firing. During that same day we took a round through the windshield on the co-pilot right side during the second sortie. My co-pilot, CPT Nichols, momentarily froze on the controls as I anxiously monitored the torque as we were to start a departure. I did not realize the situation as I felt something hit my shoulder. I initially thought that a round had come in from behind and glanced off my upper arm. As we climbed to altitude I noticed the green house window was fluttering in the breeze. I then realized why Nichols had froze on the controls. The bullet had gone right over his head and the pieces of Plexiglas had peppered his sunglasses in an instant. A quick check of the aircraft revealed no major problems and we quickly rejoined the flight for another insertion. Although I am sure CPT Nichols would have preferred to have called it a day. That day we started an extraction of the ARVNs and we had a lift of 40 Slicks. By day's end we had ten Slicks left and only three were legally flyable-one was mine. I started the day as chalk 12. Each time we went to pick up the troops, the mission would be aborted due to extreme enemy fire. That day the ship ahead of me would go down and I would follow them down and load up the crew to return to Khe Sanh. Of course, we were not supposed to rescue fellow pilots as we were to continue the mission, but we all agreed if we went down we were going to do whatever it took to retrieve each other when possible to enhance the odds of returning safely. When we became Chalk 3, we made it in to the LZ to begin the extraction on the third attempt. We approached the side of a hill with a gun escort on both sides. The pattern was in and out the same way. Arriving at the LZ we saw a large human dog pile as the ARVNs were in a panic to leave the AO. I instructed my crew that once we had three climbing aboard on each side, I would pull pitch to leave so that we did not become over loaded and were forced to stay for the duration. We were loaded almost instantly

when I came to a 20-foot hover. With all guns still blazing we started a normal climb out of the LZ. We were meeting Slicks as they were coming inbound. Then in a defeated voice the C&C ship said that we should call it a day and return to Khe Sanh. We had finally begun to start the extraction that we had been working on all day and now we quit? When we returned to the staging area, I asked a fellow aviator why we had stopped. He said, "Dale, didn't you see the incoming Slick blown completely out of the sky?" I had met that Slick just before the explosion.

VHPA member Dale McClure, from the 48th AHC, continues his "That Day" experiences:

That day we returned to Dong Ha to realize that the entire platoon of Gunships had been wiped out. After having an intense day of action, we would attend a funeral for a fellow aviator. On one such occasion we were all very misty-eyed when the Major calmly said, "Men, we have had several rough days, but we will have to go again." Simple words but some way they were reassuring, and since the CO was a true leader, we all respected this man greatly. Once he was shot down in the lead ship, but continued as he took over the co-pilot's seat of Chalk 2. He was always 100 percent behind his aviators no matter what. When the Jokers, the C Model Gunships from the 48th AHC, returned some so-called friendly fire, the high command was very upset and wanted to discipline the pilots. The Major said that if that was the case, don't bother to call us if you want gun support in the future. The "Gunnies" were deeply respected by all Slick pilots as these guys would always take considerable risk to protect the somewhat vulnerable Hueys. Often their 20 minute fuel warning lights were on for an extended period so that a safe escort was accomplished.

That night that we were awakened at midnight to make an emergency resupply of the ARVNs in Laos will always be remembered. The attempted mission was to drop a sling of water and ammo on an ARVN base that was being over run by some human wave assaults. The Air Force was going to pinpoint the drop zone and provide preparation with "Spooky" the C-130 gun ship. Upon picking up the slings and circling around Laos in the middle of the night (of course with lights out) the Air Force FAC advised us that we was unable to pinpoint the exact location of the area. At this point in the battle the NVA had captured so many radios that when the FAC asked for the strobe light, the whole mountain would light up. The two Gunships providing escort services advised me that they were low on fuel and if we were going to drop our loads, we needed to do it ASAP. This was relayed to the FAC and he advised us to return with the guns and the two Slicks back to Khe Sanh for fuel. Upon refueling, my sister ship reported that too much fuel was taken on and the Huey could not lift the load. I informed them to burn off fuel and meanwhile I would fly out into Laos and establish radio contact with the FAC. Unfortunately a lot of time had elapsed and the weather was closing in on us. We had been training to advise the co-pilot to be on the instruments in case we would fly into a cloud. As the ceiling lowered we had to make a quick decision to prevent the sling from hitting the trees and to avoid the mountains on both sides of the aircraft. The co-pilot turned on the landing light and promptly armed the sling so that I could punch off the load. Then I immediately place the aircraft in a hard left bank applying every ounce of power. This maneuver was not taught in flight school. At any rate this does some strange things to an aircraft and the pilot. I experienced my first case of vertigo which I felt would never affect me. My co-pilot, CPT Smith, was on the instruments as I had instructed him and was quick to inform me of my condition. I simply said, "You got it." In the clouds at night knowing that high mountains were nearby is not a comfortable feeling.

Thinking all was under control, I noticed that the airspeed was decreasing. My co-pilot did not respond as he had frozen at the controls. So I said, "I got it" and attempted to push the nose over to gain airspeed. This was a difficult task as the co-pilot had not fully released the controls. As we started to gain speed, we broke out on top, a sight I can still see in my mind, a beautiful sight with the moon shining and the stars twinkling. The Air Force FAC was on the radio wanting to know our situation. I advised him that we had encountered some weather problems and we were looking for a hole to come down in. He advised that we wait and he would get the radar people out of bed and give a ground approach to Khe Sanh. I first said it was not necessary, but quickly changed my mind and moments later we were safely on the ground at Khe Sanh which was totally fogged in then and the mission was scratched. Yes, we all fought on the side that didn't win, but we were all winners as we learned countless valuable lessons of team work. It's hard to express in words the camaraderie that we all shared, but there are feelings for your fellow pilots that will always be there. There are many other stories that came about during this operation. Although some did not live to tell their stories, it's incredible how many of us had many close calls. Although the war was not popular in the states we all gave it our best, we learned to survive and to be grateful for the wonderful life we all enjoy, knowing we were on that team.

A/101st's ORLL states that Comanchero 14 is hit in aircraft 264 while resupplying, with eight other Comanchero aircraft, a unit SW of 31. He lands at ALOUI and is "rescued". Later, the Comancheros attempt resupply of LZ 30 and are mortared off but not before several sorties make it in. Returning in late afternoon to the area about LZ 31, Comanchero Lead is swamped with 36 ARVN wounded, bleeds off while getting 20 on board out. Comanchero 24 receives mortar damage to his aircraft in the same LZ/PZ. They provide a RON flare ship again.

3 Mar - Initial assault onto LZ LOLO. Into Laos Chapter Thirteen: Victory provides some background information about the renewed offensive operations. Briefly, the ARVNs had decided to renew their offensive with the objective to reach Tchepone with their armored and air assaulted forces and then to start withdrawing. The plan called for assaulting three new LZs named after movie stars (Gina Lola Brigida Sophia Loren, and Elizabeth Taylor) on the southern escarpment and then one more, Hope, near Tchepone. The plan also called for using infantry from the 1st ARVN Div already in Laos to conduct these assaults and to replace these troops with elements from the South Vietnamese Marine Corps Division. One brigade is inserted near FB HOTEL and another around FB DELTA. Additionally the 2d Regt, 1st ARVN Inf Div with 5 battalions was made available from eastern Quang Tri because the American 3d Bde, 101st Abn and the 11th Bde, 23 Inf replaced them in their OA. Depending on your point of view, there would be three or eight assaults into LOLO. The first was scheduled as a 40 ship assault for 1000. The 223rd CAB provided the leadership for the assault with LTC Kirklighter, the Bn CO, and MAJ Klose, the Bn S-3, flying in the same ship as AMC. The 71st AHC, from the 14th CAB, was the lead company. As best we know it, the 71st AHC chalks were: CPT Dan Grigsby, lead; WO Gary Arne, Chalk 2, WO Doug Womack, Chalk 3; Jesse Dize, Chalk ?; LT Kerry McMahan, Chalk ?, and WO Ed Albrick, Chalk ?. Next came the A/101st AHB Comancheros. MAJ Bob Clewell and CPT Peter Federovich, Chalk 11; WO Robert Morris, Chalk 17; WO John Gale and CPT Gerald Crews, Chalk 18; and Steve Diehl, Chalk 19. Next came five ships from B/158. The only B/158 A/C currently known was WO Manuel Catzoela. The remaining 15 ships planned for the initial assault are not currently known. The PZ is still marked on Dan Grigsby's map at XD607317, to the northeast of DELTA.

The 71st AHC's ORLL reported the lose of #67-17269 to numerous hits with all major components incapacitated by intense fire at (30' 10Kts) and #69-15358 also took an insurmountable amount of hits, incapacitating all components of the aircraft. Both aircraft were not recovered. Also at (30' 10Kts) #68-16426 took 3 hits in fuel compartment and #68-16383 took 6 hits, that struck his transmission, while attempting to land. VHPA member Dan Grigsby remembers:

I was a Rattler Platoon Leader at that time and most of the way through my second tour in Vietnam, all with AHCs. The tactical briefing for the CA into LOLO was conducted by the 101st at Khe Sanh. I believe the briefing was for all ACs involved in the assault. I also believe that a Brigadier General from the 101st was either in attendance or gave part of the briefing. The briefing officer noted that LOLO was to be an LZ on the escarpment south of QL9 at XD432372 and once secured would be built into a FSB. The ARVN troops for the assault were already in Laos and the PZ was at XD607317. The briefing officer stated that the LZ would be single ship and that the lead ship would be picked up by the AMC a mile or so from the LZ to receive final directions to the LZ. I listened very carefully to this because the Rattlers would be the lead flight and I figured I'd be leading the company. Someone asked a question about gun cover and the briefing officer stated that there would be none ... the LZ had been Arc Lighted the night before so there should be no problem. On the morning of the 3rd, as best as I can recall, we left Khe Sanh in a very loose trail formation but after crossing the fence, we went down on the deck. My co-pilot was a Major from battalion headquarters because our company had a pilot shortage. This was his second tour in Vietnam; his first was in a fixed wing. This was early in his second tour and his first CA. I asked him if he thought he could navigate to the PZ, low level and he said yes. As I flew low level toward the PZ, he followed on the map. I can only thank whoever the Rattler was behind me who came on the radio and said, "Lead, the PZ is at nine o'clock." The pick up must have been uneventful because I don't remember it. After leaving the PZ the flight formed up with about thirty second separation in loose trail as we headed toward LOLO. I made contact with the AMC, RED OAK DRAGON 20. I'll never forget that call sign. He said he would pick us up and direct us in. About a mile out and after some confusion, we finally made eye contact with one another and he headed for the LZ. He was at a much higher altitude than we were and made a high pass over the intended LZ. He either threw out a smoke, described the LZ, or gave me headings to the LZ . or all three.

At any rate, I identified where the LZ was and headed on in. As we got within about 150 to 200 yards of the LZ, my door gunners (one was Bob Vandebos) went hot and we started taking fire. I'm not sure if this is the exact sequence by my recollection is that everyone quickly understood this was going to be trouble and I was impressed they didn't need to be told to start shooting. It may be what they saw on the ground. At any rate, as we approached the LZ the fire became more intense. I was coming in fairly hot and flared, looking for a touchdown spot. The LZ was lousy under the very best of conditions and under fire it was terrible. I picked a spot, brought the aircraft to a hover and when the troops were off grabbed a bunch of collective to get the hell out of there. A lot of things happend in those few seconds that are forever burned in my mind. Out of my peripheral vision I saw muzzle flashes to the front, left and right. I noticed NVA running in a crouch to the left front of the aircraft. I also noticed my co-pilot's head bobbing and weaving as if he were dodging bullets. I glanced at the instruments - without really seeing anything and pulled pitch. I don't see any way the ARVN who got off my ship ever made it to the trees. As I was

pulling out, I called RED OAK DRAGON 20 and told him (I may very well have screamed it) that the LZ was surrounded, we were taking heavy fire, the LZ was for &#\$@, and that we needed to move the LZ or cancel the assault -- or words to that effect. His response was, "Negative, Negative ----- or words to that effect. It didn't take long for all hell to break loose. I took off to the left, cleared the trees and stayed on the deck until we were out of the area. I climbed to altitude and headed back toward the PZ. I tried to light a cigarette by keeping the cyclic between my knees but my hands were shaking so bad that I couldn't. I asked the co-pilot to take the controls. After I finally lit the cigarette, I took back the controls and started to decelerate our airspeed. When I pulled back on the cyclic, it wouldn't move. I told the co-pilot there was something binding the cyclic. He looked down and said there wasn't. I thought to myself, "Christ, what now?" I looked in the back and saw some blood stained bullet holes in the floor. I was petrified. I was sure a push- pull tube had been shot through and that we could lose it at any moment. I headed for Khe Sanh. Since I couldn't reduce the airspeed below 90 knots, I decided to shoot a running landing at Khe Sanh. I recall when reporting a mile final for a straight in, the tower acknowledge, "Roger 26, you'll be emergency number three following the aircraft burning on short final." When I got to a quarter mile, another aircraft declared a very frantic emergency and I told the tower I could probably put the aircraft on the ground next to the runway. This was an incredibly stupid idea coming in at 90 knots and the tower acknowledged it by stating, "&*\$# 26, put the &*\$# thing on the &*\$# runway! That's what it's there for! We'll get you off!" Sure enough, before the blades came to a stop, they'd slung a chain around the cross tubes and jerked the Huey off the runway with a tug. I was impressed. After we shut it down and opened up the panels, we found that a round had come through the transmission fire wall and a piece of shrapnel had lodged in a bell crank. This caused the cyclic binding. I went and found our company's maintenance aircraft and continued flying sorties because I logged nine hours that day.

VHPA member Gary Arne recalls:

During the briefing the night before at Khe Sanh, I remember this Colonel telling us that this was a secure LZ, a piece of cake mission. There was a General in the briefing as well. We were also told there would be no gun cover for the insert because it was a secure LZ. Several crews even talked about not wearing chicken plates. We hadn't flown in Laos before, so we didn't know any better. I decided that we would wear our plates and we'd be prepared for the worst. I'm alive today because of the chicken plate. I flew Chalk 2 with a CPT from our company named Jones, I think. He had been with us for 10 months. He was from the other platoon; a nice guy. He had no desire to be an aircraft commander but he was a good pilot. I agree with Dan, we picked up the ARVNs in Laos and formed up the flight. We stayed low level most of the time. I remember making two false inserts. I think the first few ships were involved in these. Then we got down to the real thing. I listened to Dan talk with the C&C until he finally identified the LZ. No smoke to identify a secure LZ - I remember thinking: "That briefing was bogus!" I told my co-pilot to get on the controls with me in case things got bad. I watched Dan go in but didn't see him take any fire. I was 20 to 30 seconds behind him. Just as he was leaving and starting to talk on the radio, we got real busy! We were about 100 feet up when the windshield explodes and I take three rounds in the chicken plate and three more in the sliding armored plate on my seat. They continue to rake the left side of the Huey. The crew chief, Johnny Blackburn, yells that he has been hit. Next the tail rotor gets shot out because we start to spin, not fast but we were spinning.

I decided that we'd try to fly back to Khe Sanh rather than attempt to land in the LZ without a tail rotor. So I set up to keep flying rather than touch down. Just as we pass over the LZ, the hydraulics go out. I was glad the co-pilot was on the controls with me. We picked up a little airspeed, maybe 40 knots and the tail is starting to streamline some when the engine quits. With only jungle to the front, we give it hard left cyclic to try to get back near the LZ. We were coming in about 45 degrees to the LZ and were getting low, maybe 10 feet or so, when the transmission seized. We fell the rest of the way and the ship crashed on my side. The co-pilot and I climbed out through the back.

I expected to see a few ARVN in the ship someplace but there were none and that surprised me. The gunner joined us behind a log. We counted noses, then I went back and got the crew chief. We dressed his leg wound. He had been hit below the left knee. We could see NVA running off the LZ in all directions. We couldn't see any ARVN but we were some distance from where they were going in. We only had one weapon, the 38 the co-pilot was carrying. I left the shotgun I carried in the ship. Not long after that an NVA started running from the LZ and literally jumped over our log. He had an AK and the co-pilot started shooting at him with the 38. I grabbed his arm and said "What are you doing?" "Trying to kill the sucker - isn't that what we are supposed to do?" "Don't attract any attention - he has an AK and can kill us all in a minute!" We stayed behind the log for about an hour, then started moving up toward the LZ. We got part way and stayed behind another log for another hour. The ARVN threw a lot of grenades as they expanded their perimeter. One went off about 10 feet from us but didn't hurt us. After the third hour we saw these Vietnamese waving at us to come up to them. We couldn't tell if they were ARVN or NVA, but we went anyway because we couldn't have gotten away. I remember there was an American Captain using a radio to call in artillery and doing a WONDERFUL JOB! He knew what he was doing on the ground but we didn't. He must have been part of the crew of another ship that was shot down. He and this ARVN Major argued a lot. That Army Captain was a hero in my book. It was unbelievably hot on the ground and we didn't have any water. When I removed my chicken plate, there were the three armored bullets just sticking through the back side. I was one lucky soul! I later learned that another ship from our company had been shot down after us but the crew was picked up soon. There was plenty of war on the LZ. AK and 51 cal fire went over our heads constantly. The LZ was being mortared. You didn't want to be on the LZ itself, just on the periphery. I watched a Huey come into the LZ on fire. They landed fine and everyone got out but the co-pilot forgot to duck. He was hit in the head by the blade and died. I had the unpleasant task of retrieving his dog tags. I watched several medevac ships come and go. They were doing a good job. Finally, it was our turn. I helped my crew chief onto the ship and jumped on myself. We hadn't been in the air long when the pilot turned and said someone from my company wanted to talk to me on the radio. I borrowed a helmet and told him this was RATTLER 25, this is the story about us, and this is where they need air strikes on LOLO. When I got back to camp, they had already rolled up my bedroll and tagged my stuff to be shipped out. I guess one of the DUSTOFF ships had relayed information that we couldn't have survived that crash. The next morning I went to the hospital and ended up sleeping for three days.

VHPA member Doug Womack describes the events as follows:

I was the AC in Chalk 3 that morning flying my usual ship, #68- 16383. My platoon leader, CPT Dan Grigsby, normally Rattler 26 but for the operation we used the call sign Benign Fires, was lead in #68-16426. WO1 Gary Arne was the AC in Chalk 2 flying #67-17269. I don't recall the order or the names of the others in the flight but I know the LT Kerry McMahon and WO1 Ed Albrick were some place behind me. What the official records don't mention is that there were at least three major screw-ups before we even got our first ships near the LZ. First, the LZ had been blown by a Daisy Cutter and prepped the day before; so the NVA had one evening, one night and part of this morning to prepare their defenses. These included not only anti-aircraft weapons but also spider holes actually on the LZ! Second, we saw no prep that morning. When we arrived the only smoke coming from the area was marker thrown from the Battalion C&C bird. Third, we had no gun cover. By way of background information I'd like to mention two other points. First, while the 71st had been at Quang Tri since the second week of February, principally, it had supported Dewey Canyon II especially the 1/5th Mech. We spent little time in Laos prior to this time. We were involved in the efforts to extract LZs 30 and 31 as I mentioned earlier but most of our support across the border in February went to the USMC ARVN Marine advisor, MAJ Fred Tolleson, for numerous VRs. This was because the 14th CAB had been assigned responsibility for air support of the ARVN Marines. Second, prior to our assignment to support Dewey Canyon II and unknown to us, the 71st was slated to stand down. As a result we received few replacements and we were especially short pilots and maintenance specialists. On the 3rd some of the right seats were occupied by rear echelon pilots from the 14th CAB for the day. I take considerable exception to Into Laos page 261 second paragraph where he talks about Cobras firing and then maintaining a scouting orbit while the first slicks landed and how the first few Hueys went in and out without difficulty.

What really happened was that there was no gun cover and our approach path was parallel to the river and onto the escarpment. Dan Grigsby takes all sorts of fire on the way into the LZ. As was normal for any recently blown LZ, the tree stumps are still sticking up several feet into the air. While he is in the LZ, he takes three hits in the fuel compartment. As he is leaving he takes more hits because he reported having no aft- cyclic control. Chalk 2 lost his tail rotor and hydraulics to enemy fire as he pulled power to get away. This caused the ship to spin wildly, and we saw the ARVN falling out like rag dolls. I later learned that the guys in the back wrapped mic cords around some to keep them from falling out. We watch him spin in. Dan's making radio calls to the commanders to cancel the CA. At this point I do a 360 to see what the C&C would say. Dan lifts out of the LZ and there is silence from the commanders, so we can only guess that the assault is still on. One of the guys behind me calls to ask if I'm going in, I say "Yeah, I'm going in" and start in with a steep approach. I had flown #68-16383 enough that I knew what the systems would do, so I kept my eyes outside the cockpit most of the time. My poor peter pilot was scared - hell, I was scared! I was so scared that even to this day I can distinctly remember that the time continuum slowed down during that approach. I could literally watch each turn of the rotor blade! The co-pilot tried to talk to me but couldn't, so he ended up pointing a lot. We were building RPM like mad at the bottom of the approach. I knew it, and he was pointing it out to me. We weren't hit on the way in but took a lot of damage in the LZ itself. The way I know this is because the entry and exit holes were on the same level. I remember the ship rocking in the LZ and I thought it was just the CG changes because of the ARVN jumping off; but it was really bullets hitting hard points. We took one on a skid, one into the frame, one on the gunner's machine gun mount that certainly saved his life, the fuel filler cap had shrapnel all around it, a

round passed just to the left of the gunner's head into the transmission, and we later found that one of the main rotor blades had an entry and exit hole two feet apart but the main spar wasn't hurt. When the troops were out of the ship, I just started putting the collective under my arm pit until the systems started talking about the strain and my pilot was pointing at the torque. As we cleared the trees, nosed over and reduced collective, I looked at the instruments and saw the transmission oil pressure fluctuating wildly. I broke left, using the trees for cover, and headed for Khe Sanh, making a minimum number of power changes. I remember looking back because I could hear the transmission making a unfamiliar sound. It looked as if the ship was bleeding, the transmission fluid was streaming through the cracks in the inspection panel. That was very gut wrenching for me because I knew with that sort of damage, I couldn't risk picking up Arne and his crew. I couldn't see him anyway. He had crashed on what was our right side and just on the other side of a small rise. My pilot either didn't see that or wasn't looking for him. I remembered that we had been taught that the transmission will start to come apart when you lowered the collective; so we shouldn't autorotate. Just as I lowered the collective on final, the pressure dropped to zero. I made a power on landing to the "hook out pad". Dan Grigsby made a running landing and soon Ed Albrick came in with damage to his particle separator screens. We took the parts off #68-16383 to fix his ship right away. He had a new pilot and this kid was in shock. We literally had to lift him out of his seat and take him to the medics. I flew with Ed in his ship to pick up another sortie. I remember the next day the maintenance guys just overfilled the transmission in #68- 16383 and flew it back to Quang Tri. That didn't seem too smart to me. You could almost put your fist in the hole in the transmission housing, so the metal from that plus the bullet had to be inside someplace. That ship actually made it back to the States before me. It was repaired and returned to operations but during a later inspection the bent frame was discovered. We all received impact awards of DFCs and Gary Arne received a Silver Star for calling in air strikes before he was extracted.

VHPA member Jesse Dize, with the 48th AHC, was shot down in UH-1H 117 and recalls:

The 48th left Dong Ha about 6:30 that morning and moved to Ham Ne, right on the border. Only our company and some ARVNs were there plus a few VNAF aircraft. I had traded in the "Old Dog". (See Jesse's comments on 11 Mar for some background information about his aircraft named the "Old Dog" and its crew chief, SP4 Mike Sather.) That day I was in the left seat of 177. We had just been received it from the 189th AHC and it still had 189 painted on its doors. 177 filled in for the "Old Dog" and spared her an ignoble death as a burnt and twisted pile of junk at the bottom of a gully in Laos. WO1 Semore, the copilot was in the right pilot's seat. SP4 Hickman, the crewchief, was in the right crew/gunner's well. PV2 Taigre (sp?) was the gunner and seated in the left crew/gunner's well. We were flying in our usual flight position of chalk-last. About 8 a.m. the flight was in route to the PZ, cruising at 4000 feet when Flight Lead report receiving fire. We may have been part of the lift going to LOLO, I am not certain. The flight immediately started doing "S" turns. About 15 seconds later 177 shuttered, bucked upward, staggered to the right, and finally stabilized with a slight nose down attitude. The crewchief, SP4 Hickman, scream that we were on fire. A second later burning fuel ran under my feet and into the chin-bubble. The cockpit started to fill with smoke. I rammed the collective down, kicked in left pedal, and applied right cyclic. This was a tactic that we used in the mountains for rapid descents through enemy fire when going into valleys or bowl type LZs. The aircraft was now falling like a rock in a tight left descending turn. We were about 3200 feet AGL and we need to get down fast.

The cockpit was filled with smoke, I could only see out of the door window, breathing was becoming difficult, and I could feel the heat. In an attempt to get air and clear out the smoke, I tried jettisoning my door. That turned out to be a futile maneuver. The door never left the aircraft. Kicking the aircraft out trim to the left caused the burning fuel to run over to left forward section, my corner, of the aircraft. It was a hot time for me but took the flames away from the rest of the crew. I can assure you, I am not a masochist and I was not trying to be a hero. My only goal was to get to the ground and away from the fire. We had more troubles than just a fire. It seem like all the warning and all the caution lights were dimly lit with their light filtered by the smoke. I did some things that I should not have done like telling Semore, turn of the fuel while I shut down the engine. Should have kept it running, crashing power on is better than crashing power off. This was probably only an academic question anyway. I can not say for certain what the engine's condition was after we were hit . The last thing on my mind was reading those little engine instructions, the N1, the EGT, and the torque. The big main rotor RPM gage was the only thing that I was concern with and it was difficult to read because of the smoke.

Later, Hickman stated that on the way down, he remembered thinking how odd it was to be able to see engine from the crewchief's seat. The two are normally separated by a firewall. When, I tried to roll out of the turn I had trouble moving the cyclic. It resisted every input with pounding feed back. When I tried to pull up on the collective it would at first resist then break loose, move to far upward, and repeat the process when I tried to push it down. Semore, got on the controls with me and together we were able to gain control the aircraft. We were trying to make an LZ that was to the east of us. I seem to remember that it was LZ Brown, but old age has dulled my memory. We crashed a little short, about a half mile short. I can remember looking through the smoke and seeing what I thought was flat ground slopping up toward the LZ. At what looked to be about 100 feet, we pulled aft cyclic and entered a flare. At what looked to be about 20 feet, we pulled up on the collective as hard as we could. And then surprise, surprise, surprise. As we went through what I thought was zero feet AGL, the LZ disappear behind that flat piece of ground. I was landing us in a gully and had been using its left (north) ridgeline as my visual reference. The Huey impacted at mid-slop on the left side of the gully. We had zero'ed our airspeed and hit straight down with no forward movement. The left skid hit first and broke off. The aircraft rolled over to the right, shedding its main rotor and tail-boom. The aircraft came to rest on its back with the left side down slope from right side. The left side was now on the right and was at the very bottom of the gully smothered by small trees. The tailboom was broken off and twisted with the tail fin lying to the right and partially under the main fuselage. The main rotor with its broken blades was lying to the right and up slope from the up-side-down fuselage. The flames were gone from cockpit but I could hear their crackle and roar behind me. I was hanging up-side-down in my seatbelt and shoulder harness. I pulled the seat belt release. My body doubled over and my feet fell onto the windshield. But I could not get my upper body separated from the shoulder straps. The left shoulder strap's adjustment mechanism was tangle in my survival vest and the inertial reel was locked. I could not move my upper body. I was trapped. My only option was to cut the strap with my knife. It seem to take an eternity to remove the knife from the scabbard, saw through the strap, and return the knife to the scabbard. I have no idea why I bothered to re- sheath the knife. I had the feeling that I was locked-up in a half size phone booth. The cockpit door was still on the aircraft. The door was either jammed or blocked by the bushes. I kicked out the window. By this time, Semore, who had not had any escape difficulties, had come around the aircraft and helped me through the window. Hickman was

standing up slop from the aircraft. Tiagre (sp?) the gunner, was nowhere to be seen. The aircraft was burning with flames shooting from both cargo door openings. The gunners station was in the left well on the same side with the aircraft commander. This area was jammed against the south slop and was totally engulfed in flames. Against the orders of the AMC, Keith Wyson broke formation and followed us down. He was hovering at the top of the north slop waiting for us.

Noting that there was nothing any of us could do Hickman, Semore, and I clambered up the slop and crawled into his Huey. We probably owe our lives to Wysong. As I was climbing up the slope, I noticed that Wysong's crewchief was working out with his 60 and that the copilot was waving frantically for us to get on board. But in my dazed state, I could not interpret or connect the two actions. Later, Wysong told me that they saw bad guys making their way toward the crash site. The story does have a happy ending. Tiagre (sp?) the gunner, was not burned up in the crash as we first feared. He was the first one out of the crash. He may have even been thrown from the helicopter, when it was rolling down the slop. He had burns and a broken arm. In his dazed and shocked state, he apparently, started running to get away from the burning aircraft and kept running until he collapsed, several hundred meters from the away. Somehow, a medivac helicopter spotted and retrieved him about two hours later. He was off loaded at Ke Son aid station just as we were leaving. His rescue made our day. He was medivaced to the states for burn treatment. I saw him once several months later at Fort Lewis. He was doing find. He had received the proverbial million dollar wound. There were several unique things about the shooting down of 177. I know of no other helicopter ever shot down from that high of an altitude. At least not with a crew that lived to tell about it. I know of no other helicopter that had experienced ruptured fuel cells together with burning fuel flowing in the aircraft. Again, at least not with a crew that lived to tell about it. The crew's injuries were also strange. I was in the left front of the aircraft. I had a minor back bone (coccyx) broken and second and first degree burns. The gunner in the left crew well, had broken bones and second and some third degree burns. The crewchief, in the right crew well, had only minor first degree burns and some abrasions. But the copilot had no injuries at all and was flying the next day. Finally, I never heard of another helicopter being shot down in route to a PZ. Sort of like being thrown out of the game before entering the stadium. When I was released from Quang Tri Army Hospital a couple of days later, I found myself to be the blunt of ribbing because of my radio procedures. It seems that my mighty and powerfull index finger had squeezed the life out of the cyclic transmit trigger and the whole world knew of my plight and every thing that I said to the crew. I was told that the beginning of my transmission was quite cool, calm and professional and went something like this, "Lead, seven seven. I've taken a hit. Breaking fromation for LZ Brown. The chief says we have a fire. GOD DAMN WE'RE ON FIRE." My professional decorum was down hill from that point on with every word out of my month being transmitted. Our loses had a strange pattern. We had plenty of wounded. I think my Purple Heart was the 33rd.

Now we hear from the Comancheros, A/101 AHB. VHPA member Bob Clewell was the company commander. He and CPT Peter Federeovich flew Chalk 11 (the lead Comanchero) into Lolo with SSG Miguel as the CE and SP4 Glenn Nichol as the gunner. Bob recalls:

By the time the Comancheros started loading troops in the PZ it was getting hot. I remember mortar fire and believe this is what attracted the gunships. By way of background information, Cobras had been in short supply for the last few days. They were parceled out with great care by

the controllers. I had spent the night at Khe Sanh and attended the briefing. Most of my company had flown up that morning, so we briefed them just before the mission. After we were loaded we formed up our own flight and headed east. I believe the Rattlers flew past the LZ during the time they were working with the AMC to identify it. The Rattlers flew a corkscrew approach to the LZ. Between the time that Chalk 2 crashed and Chalk 3 started his assault (he really did become the leader of what was the second assault onto LOLO) a set of Charlie Model guns made a firing pass over the LZ. I believe during their second firing pass one or both were shot down. One crashed on the escarpment not too far from the LZ. Chalk 3 then continued the assault. Chalk 4, another Rattler, was shot down in the LZ. (Editor's note: This was UH-1H #69-15358. The CE was Will Fortenberry. The names of the rest of the crew are not currently known.) Another Rattler ship may have gone in. Things were very chaotic. We set up our flight to go in using our standard, straight-in, mutually supporting, 30 second separation tactics. At that point we were mixing Rattler and Comanchero chawks because I believe we were the fifth or sixth ship to get in. No one told us that you physically couldn't land to the first bomb crater. The slope was too steep. The photo doesn't show it clearly but there are tall rocks between the two craters. Our gunners in the back saw NVA all over the place in camouflaged positions. They were like ants coming out of the ground. As we hovered over the rocks to get to the next crater, I remember this one fellow coming out of the rocks to shoot at us. We took at least one hit in the engine access area. As we moved by him, our gunner was winning the duel with that NVA. Our ARVN got off quickly and we departed. Since we had battle damage we headed back to Khe Sanh listening to the aircraft in our company as we went.

VHPA member Bob. Morris was the AC in Chalk 16 or 17 into Lolo and remembers:

I was Comanchero 30. Tom O'Daniel (later he was Comanchero 13) was my co-pilot and a guy named SP4 T. Jones was the CE. Jones was from Oologah, OK and we all remember kidding him about that. I don't remember the gunner's name. I don't remember where the PZ was but I do remember some ships taking fire from these grass huts and the area around the troops we were picking up. I remembering thinking "Come on - this isn't a good way to start this mission!" Sure enough, it got worse! We took fire during the final approach. The tree line to the left opened up on us almost as if they were waiting for us to get low and slow. I remember hearing the hits in the tail boom. We dropped off the ARVN and took off. I thought everything was working good - we were OK. Then I heard someone yell "We're on fire! We're on fire!" I knew it wasn't FM or VHF, but I couldn't tell if it was on UHF or intercom. I called to the CE and asked if we were on fire. He didn't answer. I looked at the gauges - everything was in the green. I called to Jones again but he didn't answer. We must have been about 30 seconds from the LZ when Jones finally comes on the intercom and says "Ah, Mr. Morris - you do know we're on fire!" I later learned that it was so hot in the CE's well that he had moved. In doing so, he had unplugged, so he didn't hear my questions. I knew there were no friendly bases within miles, so I had no choice but to return to Lolo. On final for the second approach, we took more fire. On short final, a round came through my chin bubble and hit the KY28. That really scared me. I remember thinking - Wow the bad guys are right in the LZ with the ARVN! We landed back in the LZ. The guys in the back came up quickly and helped us unstrap and out of our seats. I got out of the Huey, saw a log near-by and got behind it. I was still really scared because of that round that hit the KY28. The rest of the crew ran to a trench to the front of the Huey. They called to me and I joined them. The trench was about 2 foot wide and maybe 3 foot deep. I remember part of it was covered with

wood and brush. There were ARVN in it and one was even eating rice. One was shot in the middle finger and it wasn't doing too well. I helped bandage his hand. Our Huey was streaming fuel but there was no fire.

To this day I haven't figured it out completely. Tom and I talked this over as we prepared this material for the VHPA. We believe that either the fire blew out when we picked up speed or we landed pretty hard in the soft dirt. There was enough dust that it might have put the fire out. We hadn't been on the ground long when John Gale lands just off our left front. We all jumped in his ship. I remember thinking - this is great - we haven't been here long. Well a few seconds later, the CE jumped out and looked up at the engine area. He started shaking his head so the rest of us got out too. The engine area was on fire; so we went back to the trench. I had a little survival radio and CPT Jerry Crews from John's ship got on a radio he borrowed from the ARVN. We told the C&C to halt the assault until we could put an end to the NVA in the trees to the south. We told them it was really a 50 - 50 chance of getting shot down. We were in no immediate personal danger from the NVA, but they had the upper hand on any helicopters landing. They did stop the assault while some Cobras fired up the tree line to the south. There was a lull in the action at that time. Jones made several trips to our Huey and brought back his M-60, my flight bag with my Super-8 camera, and some other stuff. Not long after this, a crew from a downed UH-1C walking into the LZ from the north side. They said the NVA had fired at them as they ran away from the LZ. The Americans were moving toward the LZ and the NVA away from it. After the lull when the Cobras had fired, we saw another Comanchero ship, Steve Diehl I think, try to get in. He took lots of fire and didn't get in. They halted the assault again and put some more stuff into the trees to the south.

VHPA member Bob Clewell continues:

I can't describe the feelings I had listening to my company and the Rattlers get shot to ribbons as we flew back to Khe Sanh. We heard Morris do a forced landing on LOLO and then John Gale with Jerry Crews have to stay on the LZ because their ship is on fire. There are four Hueys down on LOLO plus the two Charlie Model guns! Just as we are getting close to Khe Sanh and will have to switch to talk to them, we listen to the last of the Comancheros try to get in - Steve Diehl. They take a lot of fire, their CE sustains a terrible leg wound and Diehl calls "Mayday". Later we learned that the CE was hit in a main artery and sprayed blood all over the inside of the aircraft. The pilots, the ARVN, all were covered with blood. Steve landed to the road (Route 9) where they transfer the wounded CE to a DUSTOFF which races him back to Khe Sanh. He is alive today and doing fine, I'm glad to say. The ARVN were put in another helicopter; then Steve and his pilot fly their bloody ship back to Khe Sanh. After everyone had refueled and checked or swapped aircraft, we sort of assembled all the Aircraft Commanders from the three or four companies involved in the initial assaults. Let me tell you, there were plenty of ashen faces in that crowd! The Comancheros had lost an entire crew (CW2 Berg on 18 Feb) during a SOG-CCN mission and we were determined not to lose anyone else. I remember this one tall 1LT who wasn't an AC - he was most emphatic that we go back to put more ARVN in and get our people how. We compared notes and estimated how many ARVN were on LOLO and how many Americans. Chalks 20 and higher still had their ARVN with them. We (the Comancheros) said that we were definitely going back and asked how many would come with us. Everyone was scared to death but we knew we had to do something - we couldn't leave those guys alone for

very long or the NVA would have them. Everyone raised their hands. I'd guess there was at least 15 ships. To this day, I think that was a turning point of sorts for those of us in that battle. We weren't "northern units" and "guys from the south" anymore. One company or even one battalion simply could not "do it all" themselves. We all needed each other to make it - pilots, enlisted, maintenance, AHCs, 101st units - everyone! Anyway, we organized ourselves, loaded with ARVNs, got some Cobras and headed back to LOLO. All these proceedings took about an hour or more. I'd guess it was about 1220 or so when we checked back in the ACM.

With the initial assault "blown", the AMC had gone to work getting another effort organized. This would be known as the "1300 assault." VHPA member Bill Early, who flew with the 174th AHC, provided some details:

That morning the 174th had been flying resupply missions to the eastern ARVN FSBs in Laos. There was a "general recall" and we assembled into a flight of ten for a CA into LOLO. I believe the other 174th ACs were CPT Bishop, LT Wayne Mullally, LT Miller, CPT Charles Johnson, WO Guy "Cowboy" Martin and WO Neal "Duke" Varner. We were briefed about the aircraft losses from earlier in the morning and went to the PZ. I remember the PZ was cold but the flight from the PZ to LOLO was utter chaos! I was Chalk 8 but I believe I ended up being the first 174th aircraft to land on LOLO. Chalk 4 was CPT Bishop. I heard him ask for a smoke on the LZ and soon he said, "I've got Mellow Yellow"; then his aircraft, #68-15639, was shot down. They were landing to a smoke in an LZ between DELTA and LOLO thrown by the NVA who were obviously monitoring the radio. Their gunner, CPL Gary T. Padilla, died on his gun. The crew chief, Rhodes, survived the landing of the burning aircraft and stayed with Bishop. The copilot, LT Carl Flemer, got out of the aircraft and E&E'd all the way back to an ARVN FSB near the border. LT Mullally was the AC of Chalk 5 behind Bishop. I don't know if he made it to LOLO or not. When we got to LOLO I remember RED DRAGON 09 telling us to "land to the burning aircraft". (Editor's note: This could have been John Gale's Comanchero or Will Fortenberry's Rattler ship.) I also remember a 51 cal firing at us from what looked like the LZ itself. We took heavy fire all the way in.

VHPA member Bob Clewell from A/101st continues:

We called the AMC when we were about four minutes out and told him of our intentions. It was then we learned about the 174th AHC's assault, so we joined that it. As we flew towards LOLO we passed an area that was about 1600 meters long and 800 meters wide. It must have contained a well organized NVA force; maybe a full battalion, because it erupted with small arms fire as I have never seen in my entire life! The Cobras pulled up and put themselves between us and this rectangle of fire. I was impressed that they would do that - draw the fire away from us. Finally about 3 or 4Ks from LOLO we were just receiving normal small arms fire and that actually felt better! I was flying with WO Wallace, an extremely good Comanchero ACs, as the first ship from our "reorganized assault". After the ARVN got out (one stayed because he received a bad leg wound from the fire we took en route), we hovered over the LZ to see if we could get our people. But we couldn't see them. Things were just too hot and I believe they were still in the trench. It wasn't long after this that one of the Lancer ships was hit by an RPG in the rear and crashed just in front of the Huey that wasn't burning. (Editor's note: Bob Morris' ship did not burn.)

VHPA member Bob Morris continues:

When they started the assault again, a couple more ships got in. They were from B/158, the Lancers. We watched the troops get off this one and a second or two after he started to leave the LZ we heard this big WHAM and he comes crashing to the ground. It might have been an RPG - I don't know. Anyway, the Huey lands in some soft dirt, not far from our trench, and the front of the Huey sinks in. LT Charles R. Anderson didn't take this into consideration when he got out of the ship and started running toward the trench. He was hit in the head by the main rotor and died on the spot. The AC was WO Manuel Catzoela. Their CE, a tall good looking man, had taken an AK round in the head with no exit wound. (Editor's note: His name might be SP4 Paul Sgambati because he died either that day or the next from injuries he received on the 3rd.) He was not conscience but was still alive. We took the door off one of the Hueys to make a stretcher for him and tried to help him by putting water on him. I remember thinking that the wound was pretty bad and I didn't believe he would live. John Gale's ship took a few hours to burn completely. During that time I took Super 8 movies with my camera. That assault ended and they put some F4s in. I remember being in the trench and watching these big black bombs cruise over our heads into the trees. That finally chased the NVA and we didn't have that much trouble after that. There was a lull in the firing and we actually started walking about some. Tom and I both remember Jones coming back to us all excited because the gunner had just killed an NVA. They were walking around the trench when suddenly they see this NVA walking toward them. Both men stopped, looked and raised their rifles to shoot. The M-16 beat the AK-47. A little later in the afternoon, we thought that the hill might provide enough of a mask from the NVA that we could get a ship in to get the wounded CE out. Several of us carried him down the hill. I left all my stuff in the trench. It was extremely hot. I was exhausted - we were all just beat especially working with the wounded man. A Huey came in but couldn't get low enough to the ground - maybe his tail rotor or main rotor was about to hit something. They were still 5 or 6 feet above us. When we held the door up over our heads so they could pull him in, he fell off and landed on the ground. We felt badly but we were doing our best. Anyway, we put him back on the door and lifted him up a second time. This time the guys in the Huey were able to get him into the ship. We were so happy that they hadn't been shot at and that they had the wounded man on board that we started motioning for them to get the heck out of there. But they motioned for us to climb in. We looked around to determine who should go - there was only six of us, so we helped each other in. I was too weak to climb in and only had my arms on the skid. He started to take off and they kept yelling "Get in! Get in!" but I just couldn't. Finally, the pilot moved the ship over to a place where I could get my feet on the ground again. With a jump, I got into the Huey. I remember thinking - my camera, flight bag, and helmet were all up in the trench - to heck with it; I need to get out of here! I believe it was about 4 p.m. when we got back to Khe Sanh. I got the next day off. But a day or two later I started talking about my camera and equipment. One of the guys from my unit had been back to LOLO on a resupply and said that the ARVN who guided the helicopters in was wearing a flight helmet! I remember another interesting thing about those times. There was this civilian guy who came to the officers' club sometimes after we had been involved in some serious stuff. He had a tape recorder and would interview various guys. Usually a day or two after the action, he would just show up in the evening and ask the first pilot he saw "Were you involved with such and such?" We'd point out the guy he should talk to and he would start talking with the guy. Not long after LOLO, he interviewed me. I can remember drawing a map of the trench system and other details about the events of the 3rd. We talked for

about 30 minutes. Then he left. I think he was under contract with the government to gather this info. He certainly wasn't from the news media. So who knows ... maybe if the VHPA digs long enough we can find all that stuff. Then we could compare the war stories as we told them then to the ones we are telling now and see which ones we like better!!

VHPA member John Gale, Comanchero 14, was Chalk 18 in UH-1H #67- 17720. He tells his story this way:

CPT Jerry Crews was the co-pilot, SP4 Boop the CE, and SP4 Johnson was the gunner. We took heavy fire going in and caught fire. The ARVN got off and initially we didn't think things were too bad. We landed to the left of the ship that wasn't burning. On the other side of it there was a burning Huey. I got out of the aircraft with just my survival gear and 38 pistol. Realizing that I wanted more fire power, so I got an M-16 and one magazine from a severely wounded ARVN. Jerry Crews was on his second tour. During his first in 1967-68 he was with a Special Forces "A" team at Lang Vei. He was in the vicinity of Lang Vei, when it was overrun by PT-76 tanks in Feb 1968, at the beginning of the TET offensive. Now, in the third week of his second tour, he would use his infantry ground combat experience to work. Jerry realized the ARVN defensive positions were not making the best use of the terrain and fields of fire. He began arranging the defenses by positioning the ARVN into the empty NVA bunkers and trenches on LOLO. The NVA not only were firing on the approaching aircraft, but also were in position to put low grazing fire into the vicinity of the aircraft crews. The deafening roar of weapons firing was unbelievable, the equivalent of all the rifle ranges at Ft Polk, firing at once. It was mostly AK-47 fire but when aircraft were near we thought we heard 51 cal's. We definitely took cover because of 82mm mortar fire.

There seemed to be no concern by the NVA of having enough ammunition. I watched another Huey go down. The AC was WO Manuel Catzoela, from B/158th, and a WORWAC 70-7 classmate of mine, so we had this impromptu class reunion in the trench in front of these burning Hueys. The co-pilot was a big lieutenant named Charles Anderson. The crew chief was a tall good looking young man who was hit in the back of the head by an AK round. Although mortally wounded, he did not die on LOLO, but at the Evac hospital in Quang Tri. Anderson's last moments were running from the aircraft. He was hit in the head by the main rotor, during egress, and died on the spot. The ARVN covered the body with ponchos and had great difficulty moving his body, because of his size. Their ship might have been hit by a mortar round, because it was destroyed by fire quicker than the others. The CAs into LOLO were stopped again. Jerry Crews controlled the airstrikes on the ground, by talking to the FAC using an ARVN PC- 25 radio. The F-4's put in a mixed load of cluster bombs and napalm. The Phantoms came in low and close to Lolo, and delivered their ordnance 100-200 meters from us. I remember looking up to see fins deployed from the bombs and how close they were. When the Phantoms made their attack, the NVA did not fire. As the F-4's climbed out in full afterburner, every available NVA AK-47 poured fire into the sky. The heavy enemy fire stopped for a long time after the F-4's delivered the napalm. I recall that for the first time we could stand up on LOLO. This place really had a chilling effect on me. This was NOT business as usual. The NVA were not using their usual tactics of firing and hiding. They were staying put and fighting with great confidence. During the lull, I started working with an ARVN major to clear another LZ on the northern tip of LOLO with claymores that were knocking down the trees. I got extremely thirsty and didn't have

any water. The ARVN give me a little. Later I had a two week bout with dysentery that most likely came from this water.

VHPA member Bob Clewell continues:

The "1300 assault" did get a few more ARVNs into LOLO and only had that one ship shot down with an RPG. After our part of the assault, we spent some time looking for the 174th "Mellow Yellow guy" with negative results. Back at Khe Sanh, we were reinforced by several more Lancers. I remember Jim Lloyd (the CO of the Phoenix) joined us and that was good. We were about 26 ships strong at this point. We each made two sorties that afternoon in what is sometimes called the "1530 assault" without losing any more aircraft. We took a different approach this time. We avoided that "fire rectangle" I described earlier and basically came down the valley at about 2,500 to 3,000 AGL. Then we just turned left from the road and flew almost straight and level onto LOLO on the crest of the escarpment. This way the NVA to the rear couldn't see us coming. We didn't take that much fire from the northern face of the escarpment. It was during this "1530 assault" that all the Americans were evacuated. I was flying with CW2 Michael Victory during this period. After we were released, Mike and I went back into LOLO to get Anderson's body. He was a big man and the ARVN couldn't lift him, so our two guys went and helped get him into our ship. We took it to the Khe Sahn surgical pad. I remember this sergeant came out with a litter to meet the aircraft. He motioned for two guys to come help him and they took Anderson over to the side. He worked with the ponchos covering him for a few seconds, then he stood up and saluted this dead officer. That was a very moving sight! After that I got into another Huey with CPT Peter Federeovich again. We were about to leave for the base camp when we were given this Tac E mission to go rescue some folks on FSB DELTA 1. We had a hard time finding the place and I remember thinking to heck with this. Then Peter says: "Well, we've come all this way - we might as well go get them." We didn't have any gun cover and the place had been taking incoming for some time. We ended up picking up Kevin Buckley, the Saigon bureau chief for Newsweek, Rod Ridenhour, a freelance journalist, and Mark Frankland, a Brit with the London Observer. I was upset because we were all tired and I didn't think this mission was necessary at this time especially since the flight crews had been directed not to take the media into Laos. I understand some VNAF unit had brought them out to the base. The reporters, however, were delighted to be on an American helicopter heading back to Vietnam. I remember Buckley kept saying. "Who are you guys?" My parting words were, "Just say it was the Comancheros" and that is what appeared in the March 15, 1971 issue of Newsweek with "The Helicopter War" on the cover page.

As important as LOLO was there were other activities going on in Laos. The ARVN 17th Cavalry and some ARVN Airborne troops from LZ 31 were still north and east of ALOUI. Their situation was so serious, that a six B52 Arc Light stick was put in like close air support. This halted the third major NVA attack on this force. VHPA Member Gary Grow from A/158 AHB remembers:

During early March, the GHOST RIDERS spent a lot of time resupplying and evacuating the ARVN forces north of ALOUI. I was not an A/C then and flew with WO McNeal. Our standing daily requirement was ten Hueys plus a stand-by recovery team with another ship. There was so much activity associated with ALOUI that we could use it to our advantage. We tricked the NVA

by flying high over Route 9 until we passed ALPHA. Then we would descend rapidly as if we were landing at ALOUI. The NVA would start mortaring ALOUI but we would turn north and fly low level up to the various ARVN positions. Once the NVA figured out what we were doing, they started firing artillery with tree bursts to get us. These were mostly single ship operations. We used 30 second separations, so one slick was leaving just as the one behind it was arriving. In this way we benefited by having four door guns working out versus just two. This was also a help for our gunships. I know the NVA were pressing the ARVN hard but it was sad to see healthy guys run over wounded guys on stretchers to get on our ships. I remember our flight was in a holding orbit while the Arch Light went in. We decided that we'd take advantage of the Arch Light and overfly that area during climb out. I was in the 2nd platoon. Our platoon leader, CPT Hall, and WO Salaski flew lead. I think I was in Chalk 3 or 4. They lifted out and overflew the Arch Light about 20 minutes after it went in. They took fire, CPT Hall was hit and would be evacuated because of his wounds. They said they were marking the area with yellow smoke. When we came out and "wollered" with low RPM doing maybe 50 knots. We passed over a small rise and into a valley filled with yellow smoke! Knowing that I was almost a perfect target and overflying a known enemy is very comforting to me! I believe the guns had nailed the 51 that had shot Hall and his ship.

4 Mar - The Comancheros may have been roughed up a bit at LOLO, but they were the lead company for the assault on LZ LIZ. Though behind schedule a little, LOLO was secure enough for the Chinooks to deliver the ARVN 105 artillery. The 14th CAB's ORLL records:

Both the 71st and 174th were involved with combat assaults, one for the 1st ARVN Division and one for the ARVN Marines. During this time, the 116th AHC, made up of aircraft and crews from the 116th and 176th AHC's departed Chu Lai for Quang Tri and arrived at 1210 hours. Lt. Flemer, who had been listed as MIA as of the 4th, was extracted with 4 ARVN's and returned to Quang Tri.

5 Mar - LZ SOPHIA WEST (also known as SOPHIA II) was successfully assaulted by the 2d Regt as the ARVN continued moving westward on the escarpment. The Comancheros lead this assault. This was the final FSB on the escarpment south of the Xe Pon River. The 101st Div's ORLL states that the 3d Regt had occupied FB DELTA I and LZ BROWN while the 1st Regt was conducting operations in the vicinity of LZs LIZ and LOLO. C/158 Avn lost UH-1H #67-17341 at XD346408 and crew (CPT David L. Nelson, AC, WO Ralph Moreira, pilot, SP4 Joel Hatley, CE, SP4 Michael E. King, gunner). The MIA synopsis reports:

The UH-1H was in a flight of ten aircraft on a CA mission in Savannakhet Province, Laos. While on its final approach to LZ SOPHIA, and at the time the pilot should have been making his final turn, Nelson radioed that the aircraft had been hit in the fuel cell and that the door gunner had been wounded in the head. He then said they would attempt to return to the FSB on the same flight path as previously briefed. After the other aircraft had disembarked their troops and were on their way back to the FSB, some of the other crewmen said they saw a chopper believed to be that commanded by Nelson burst into flames, crash and explode. As soon as the ball of flame was observed, attempts to make radio contact were made with no success. No formal air to ground search was attempted because of enemy anti-aircraft fire and ground activity in the area.

The 14th CAB's ORLL reported:

The 174th and 116th AHC's inserted the 1st ARVN Div. into LZ SOPHIA and met with heavy anti-aircraft fire. Three aircraft were shot down with two crews successfully recovered. Lt. Elliot and 6 crew members were stranded and all attempts at extraction had been unsuccessful.

The 174th AHC lost a UH-1H #66-16394 at XD547320. VHPA member Butch Elliott recalls some details:

I was Witchdoctor 5, the assistant maintenance officer for the 174th. CPT Greg Smith was the official MO but he flew with the gunships a lot. The night before, during the briefing for the 60 ship operation to west of FB SOPHIA WEST, we learned that the battalion plan called for three maintenance / rescue ships and that our company would supply one. Each would carry some tools plus two maintenance specialists. Our mission was to orbit the operation and to land near any downed ship as quickly as possible. Retrieving the crew was the top priority. If we could make some quick repairs to the ship so it could be flown out or lifted out, fine; but that was clearly a lower priority. The battalion MO had determined there would be two high birds, flown by himself and another Captain and that I, a Lieutenant, would fly the low bird. We launched about 15 minutes before the main flight. LT Richard Gabauer was the other pilot. He was from one of the slick platoons and assigned to fly with me for the day. SP4 Harold Brasket was the CE, ? was the gunner, and SP4 Watkins and ? were our maintenance specialists. We were just west of ALOUI when we were hit by 51 cal fire. At least one hit the engine and it quit. I got off a MAY DAY call that you can hear on the recording ? (Don Peterson I think) made. I executed a low level crash landing into the trees letting the tail boom take the brunt of the crash. No one was hurt. Everyone got out without trouble. One of the 60s was pinned against a tree but we removed the other 60 and some ammo. We only had one survival radio, our individual weapons and our individual canteens. There was no food on the ship. (Did you have one of those "secure radios" on the ship? If so, what did you do about that?) We saw some NVA coming toward us so we moved off about 200 yards. We knew the NVA would have no trouble finding our ship so there was no point in staying near it. We came to an abandoned NVA 51 cal pit that we thought we could defend and set up there. The pit was shaped like a donut. It was about ? feet across and the dirt dug out to a depth of about ? feet. It did not have any overhead cover, so we could see the aircraft that worked with us and they could see us. We were shot down about mid-morning. I talked to ?(Dale) on the survival radio so they knew that we were OK and about where we were. I know MAJ Dale Spratt, our CO, attempted to get in to get us but took too much fire and was forced away.

About ? I made initial contact with the USAF FAC. They would be our saviors. It wasn't long after that that we called in our first of 97 airstrikes as the NVA would threaten us. We figured out where a stream was and tried to move to it. There were just too many active NVA anti-aircraft positions between us and the stream, so we gave that idea up. While we were doing this we discovered a pipe line carrying fuel and reported this to the FAC. The FAC's callsigns were HAMMER and NAILS. They flew OV- 10s and were from the ?. Later in the day, he told us that he would be "out of the area for awhile" and we didn't understand why. Soon the ground began to shake and limbs fell off the trees. We determined that he had to move away while the B-52 strike was put in about a mile from us. That evening we received a pretty serious ground

probe from the NVA that in retrospect was probably intended for us to use up our ammo. My most vivid memory of that evening is the "pop" sound of spoon on a grenade flying toward us, then bouncing off the trunk of a tree in front of us, and exploding on the other side of the tree. Thank God for the AC-130 Scepter gunships. They were night vision equipped and would be fire within 20 to 30 feet of our position. The NVA quickly learned that any serious threat against us was quickly met with an airstrike during daylight hours and Scepter during the night.

6 Mar - Assault into LZ HOPE (north and east of Tchepone) was a 120 ship assault to move 2 battalions there. This LZ had been marked with a burning Huey. Also FB BRAVO was opened to protect Route 9. B/7/1 Cav lost AH-1G #67-15464 at XD470410 and crew (WO1 John F. Hummel, pilot, and WO1 William P. Milliner, co-pilot). The MIA synopsis reports:

This aircraft was in a flight of two returning from a combat support mission in Laos. While en route, the weather turned hazy. At about 2000, the other ship notified his troop's forward operations at Khe Sanh that both gunships were planning to make a CGA. That was the last radio contact with Hummel's aircraft. The lead gunship contacted the Khe Sanh GCA and was told to climb to 5000 feet and make a left 360 degree turn to a heading of 020 degrees. Hummel was still with the lead aircraft at this time but no radio contact could be established with him. Shortly after this, the GCA control told the lead aircraft to turn to a heading of 070 degrees at 4000 feet. After a descending turn was initiated, WO Hummel's aircraft passed over the top of the lead aircraft. This separation occurred in the clear and then the flight leader entered the cloud layer so no further visual sighting of the other aircraft occurred. The lead aircraft landed safely. Search and rescue efforts were begun for Hummel and Milliner but had negative results. They were listed as MIA.

The 14th CAB's ORLL reported:

There was a total effort to extract Lt. Elliot and crew, but enemy fire prevented Air Sea Rescue from extracting the downed crew. Cpt. Bishop and Sp/4 Rhodes, shot down on the 3rd of March, were extracted. The 116th with an element of the 176th AHC departed Quang Tri for Chu Lai.

The crew of Witchdoctor 5 from the 174th AHC spent their second day on the ground west of ALOUI (see 5 Mar for the beginning of this story). VHPA member Butch Elliott continues:

As mentioned previously, we put in a total of 97 airstrikes during our "visit to Laos". The USAF FAC reported that at one time he had eight sets of bombers stacked up waiting to put their loads in around us. Only once did they scare us. When the FAC talked to his jets, he would have to tune his radio to their freq and couldn't talk to us. A Thai team put a load of CBU in very close and we couldn't tell him just how close it was. Our gunner was hit in the arm from some of the shrapnel. Another strange thing happened on this day. A lone NVA happened alone and I shot him with my 38. I then crawled over to get his canteen because we really needed the water. When I returned to our pit, we discovered that the canteen was mostly empty. It had one bullet hole in it with the bullet still inside. I looked toward the NVA soldier I had "killed" and he was gone! A friend of mine still has the canteen. BG Sid Berry came over us that morning and said they had a plan for "one more thing" to get us out; but after that we were on our own. Naturally,

we understood there is only so much anyone can do; but those were pretty scary words. For security reasons he didn't tell us what they planned to do. It involved inserting the HAC BAO company about a mile southeast of us that afternoon. We weren't exactly sure what was going on at first. Then we could see what was obviously an insertion and listened to almost continual fire fights as the ARVN worked their way to us. The FACs dropped resupply canisters to us. During the entire time I think they dropped six canisters which were really flare canisters packed with sponges to protect the water bottles and radios. We only got a little water this way. We were really fortunate that one of their radios worked because by the end of the second day the batteries in the survival radio we had taken from the ship were dead. That evening the NVA that passed by our position didn't seem to be directly interested in us but seemed to be falling back from the pressure the HAC BAO put on them. We continued to use the Scepter gunships that evening.

7 Mar - The 101st Div's ORLL states that during the period 7 - 10 Mar, the forces from LZ HOPE linked up with elements to the south on the escarpment. As enemy pressure began to build in the Tchepone area, all elements withdrew south of Route 9 and began moving toward SOPHIA WEST. The 14th CAB's ORLL reported that Lt. Elliot and crew were extracted with negative injuries. VHPA member Butch Elliott, Witchdoctor 5, (see 5 and 6 Mar for the beginning of this story) continues:

I don't remember sleeping at all during those three days and two nights. We were very aware that the HAC BAO were getting close to us. We could talk to the FAC and he had a Vietnamese "backseater" who could talk to the HAC BAO. We had arranged a password - we were to call out "Witchdoctor" and they "HAC BAO". But they kept saying "A OK". We'd tell the FAC that they were not saying the correct words and to have his "backseater" get it right, but this never happened. It really didn't matter much, we only had four rounds of ammo left when they got near us. If it hadn't have been them, we would have had to go with whoever it was anyway. We linked up about 3 p.m. and moved back over the same terrain and trails they had taken to get to us. It took us about 3 hours. We passed concrete bunkers and some impressive NVA works. It was obvious that the NVA had "build to stay" in this area. I don't remember seeing any HAC BAO KIAs and I think I would have noticed if they had any. They were very good troops and certainly had our respect and appreciation - they saved our lives. When we got to the PZ, all the trees had been cut and it was ready. Ships from A/101st AVN performed the extraction. Over the years several people claimed to have been my "rescue ship". We'd talk things over and their version of the story just didn't square with my memory. Then I met Frank S? who'se remembered things just as I do. When we got back to our company, Dale grounded me. I was very interested in meeting the FACs that had done so much for us. So since I couldn't fly with my company he hitched a ride down to Da Nang and went to meet them. By quinance one of them was returning to support the operation and asked if I wanted to go along. I was very curious to see this area again, so I went. He showed me our wreck and all the area around in. That was really special and helped me understand what we had lived through during those times.

The 1st Bde, 5th Mech lost an OH-58 #68-16814 at XD652382, the crew (CW2 Randy Ard), and a battalion commander passenger. The MIA investigation report and VHPA member Pappy Cowan provide some additional information:

CW2 Randy Ard was flying a courier 58 that evening returning LTC Sheldon J. Burnett, a battalion commander, and CPT Phil Bodenhorn, the A Company CO, and SP4 Jerry Castillo, an RTO, to a field location very near the Laotian border. They mistakenly flew past the correct location and into Laos. Pappy recalls that they were 4 or 5 hundred meters from the correct point and were close to the road. They saw smoke and started an approach to what was an NVA ambush. Randy got off some MAYDAY calls. Randy and LTC Burnett were trapped in the wreck. The other two passengers got out of the aircraft and killed some NVA that approached the site. A helicopter over flew their position but took heavy fire and withdrew. After about an hour, Bodenhorn and Castillo decided they had to escape as best they could. They told Randy they were leaving and he nodded. LTC Burnett was drifting in and out of consciousness. The two were about 80 yards away when a single UH-1C made a single firing run which seemed to explode right on the wreck. Later, they watched an F4 put in a strike near the skip. Bodenhorn and Castillo linked up with ARVN troops a little later. CW2 Ard and LTC Burnett were listed as MIA since their bodies were never recovered.

VHPA Members Jim Fulbrook and Doug Womack from the 71st AHC recall:

We had just completed a log mission when we heard on guard that Witchdoctor was down. Since we had an empty slick, we tried to find out if anyone had a fix on the downed bird. We wanted them to vector us in low level because a couple of birds took damage while approaching from altitude. It meant a lot to try since they were from our battalion. We loitered for some time but never could get a vector. I'm not sure if it was the same day but we watched a tailboom tumble to the ground where a Cobra had been at altitude. I can also remember a crew pleading for somebody to see them going down because they did not have a map! Inconceivable as it may seem, a commander had sent his men into Laos without maps! It may have been this same day that we heard a C&C or an Air Force rescue ship who, when so many helicopters were being shot down at once, said "aircraft calling MAYDAY, wait one!"

SGT James L. Wieler died while serving with the 101st Abn in UH- 1H #66-16394. The information provided by the Dustoff Association states that he was involved in an aircraft accident. Please report any details to the VHPA.

8 Mar - As mentioned earlier, the 498th Med Co (Air Ambulance) maintained a detachment at Khe Sanh. VHPA member Pete Piazza provides some details:

The 498th was based out of An Son in northern II Corps yet was tasked to provide two ships with crews on a four day rotation to Khe Sanh. I was still a peter pilot during this period and only pulled a single four day stint at Khe Sanh. My roommate, Dave Borrell, was there when John Rauen and John Souther crashed on 20 Feb. Even though I'd heard all the stories, I was still pretty "wide eyed" when I was at Khe Sanh from 4 to 8 March. I made a cassette recording of all the radio traffic we heard on two different DUSTOFF missions during this period. I understand other units also recorded radio traffic but mine are the only DUSTOFF recording that I am aware of. I did this by taping into the intercom bus wiring in the overhead console with the two ends of a wire that plugged into the microphone recorder jack on the cassette recorder. I have a transcription of one of these tapes. There is an ironic story about this tape. About 198? I was teaching a class in communcations in the Guard. I made the point that on a modern battle field

we can not talk much else some one will track you and destroy you. I played this tape to let the students hear what the air ways over Vietnam sounded like. One of the students was Arnie Linder. I knew he had flown in Vietnam. He was only half listening to the tape until he heard the LOBO call sign and the part where LOBO 16 gets shot in the hand. Only then did Arnie mentioned that he was flying the other LOBO Cobra that day! Small world, isn't it? As I remember, they used to maintain about four ships on stand-by at the MED pad at Khe Sanh. Each ship and crew had a stand-by position named "1st UP", "2nd UP", etc. 1st UP would respond to the next emergency evacuation mission while 2nd UP would respond to the next "back haul" mission (moving wounded from the Khe Sanh aid station to one of the hospital areas on the coast like Quang Tri or Phu Bai). The other two were really a "ready reserve" for 1st UP and 2nd UP. We were on call 24 hours a day. About the only time you could sleep for any length of time was if you were 2nd UP or lower. We never went on a mission without gun ship escort and as a result our primary worry was not small arms fire or even AA, but mortars. We played a timing game with the NVA mortar crews. We'd fake a landing at one point on the ARVN base or point of contact. We'd wait until the first salvo was launched and quickly move to another location. We knew about how long it took the NVA to reset their mortar tubes and fire a second salvo; and we'd be gone before it landed. It seemed to me that only the walking wounded could get on the ship and that about half of the ARVN were guys who had thrown away their rifles and were getting back to Vietnam any way they could. I remember flying with Howard Modjeski. We were nearly full of fuel and there was a crowd about our ship. Mo started the aircraft forward when it was filled but even so I'd guess we had twenty ARVN on board. I was calling out max torque and loosing RPM to him as went over the side of the hill. Mo was cool and told the guys in the back that when he called out, to start throwing ARVN out. Mo was very good and we got back to Khe Sanh without having to throw anyone out. Besides my radio recordings, I have one other claim to fame from this period. I took some red, white, and blue paint and painted "Laotian Whore" as nose art on the battery cover of my aircraft because it came back to holes in it most every time it flew. Some time later it crashed after an engine failure and the CO from the 498th removed the battery cover. He still has it hanging on the wall in his house and you can still read my initials under the lettering.

B/2/17 Cav lost OH-6A #67-16645 at YD199129 and crew (1LT John D. Hale, pilot, and CPL Robert E. Grantham, observer). The MIA synopsis reports:

The OH-6A was on an armed reconnaissance mission with an AH-1G Cobra gunship and a UH-1H helicopter as a control ship. The OH-6A aircraft was attempting to start a fire on a hilltop by dropping incendiary grenades. When 1LT Hale's aircraft later made a pass over the area to see if the fire had started, it began receiving ground fire. The crew of the AH-1G gunship saw the ground fire and engaged a target while instructing Hale to break away. LT Hale called after he broke away, "I'm taking fire from 3 o'clock." The AH-1G gunship then broke away from the first source of gunfire to engage the second. At that time both the OH-6A and AH-1G pilots reported taking fire. In the next radio transmission, Hale's OH-6A reported that he was hit and was going down. He asked if he was in sight. The AH-1G gunship did see him and called the UH-1H control ship to confirm the sighting, but the control ship could not spot Hale's aircraft. The gunship began dropping white phosphorous grenades to help illuminate the area of Hale's aircraft. At the time Hale called that he was going down, his aircraft seemed to come apart and begin spinning, as if it had a tail rotor failure. Numerous objects were flying out of the aircraft

while it was spinning. The spinning slowed at about 500 feet above the ground, but increased again prior to impact. The aircraft exploded upon impact with the ground. The chase control ship went over the crash site and hovered there, looking for survivors, but due to the intense enemy fire, it had to leave the area. The control ship returned, but saw no survivors on either hover. The largest part of the aircraft that could be seen was what appeared to be the left engine door. An electronic search was unsuccessful. No ground search was possible because of the intense enemy activity. Their bodies were never recovered.

The A/101st ORLL states that Comanchero 30 was shot down in an LZ SW of DELTA. Two crewmembers were seriously wounded and evaced.

9 Mar -

10 Mar -

11 Mar - The 101st Div's ORLL for the period 11 -14 Mar states that the withdrawal from forward positions in the vicinity of Tchepone and SOPHIA WEST were accomplished overland to LZ LIZ. On the 11th, two battalions and the 2d Regt CP were extracted to FB SOPHIA EAST and subsequently to FB DELTA I, with two additional battalions moving the next day to the vicinity of LZ BROWN. The 1st Regt continued operations south and west of FB LOLO and the 3d Regt SW of FB DELTA I and LZ BROWN. The 1st VNMC Div conducted operations with two brigades in the areas of LZ DON, FB DELTA, and FB HOTEL. Resupply to all units was curtailed because of indirect and small arms fire on the LZs. The 48th AHC lost a UH-1C. CPT Ed D. Bilbrey was killed and SP4 Mike Sather was wounded and evaced. VHPA member Jesse Dize recalls:

Mike Sather was an especially good friend of mine. Let me relate why. When I became a UH-1H AC, 879, the "Old Dog" was my Huey. SP4 Mike Sather was Old Dog's crewchief. And because Old Dog was my aircraft I always referred to Mike as my crewchief as was the norm among the ACs. Mike was a story unto himself. Of all things he was a Canadian - a Canadian in the US Army crewing a helicopter in Vietnam! Not only that, he wasn't even a school trained aircraft mechanic. He was a generator mechanic. No formal training, OJT or otherwise, on aircraft, but he was one hell of a crewchief. The "Old Dog" got her name from its appearance; the results of a very poor paint job. Apparently, her original paint was high gloss. This had been painted over with low gloss paint without proper preparation. Now the outer layer of paint was peeling, revealing the under layer of gloss. The poor thing looked like she had a case of leprosy. When I became AC of 879, she also had the distinction of being the least motivated aircraft in the entire company. There were times when she couldn't lift herself off the pad. She finally puked her engine guts one day when returning from a resupply mission. The brand new zero time L-13 was obviously over-tweaked but the exhaust gas temperature and fuel consumption was normal, so who was I to complain. The Old Dog was now the strongest ship in the fleet. WO1 Ogburn challenged me on this assumption one day when we both had the same mission to resupply some Special Force guys way out in the boonies. He saw the error in his reasoning when I took-off with his load plus ten additional cases of beer after he ran out of runway and slid 079 into a constantina (sp?) wire barrier. But back to Mike Sather. One of the many pre-movement briefings for Lam Son 719 removed all restrictions on personal weapons. Mike had

another trait that I thought was restricted to Americans, he loved weapons. When the weapons restriction was lifted, Mike produced an arsenal. He mounted a hand-cranked, US Navy, 40MM belt fed, chunker (grenade launcher) on the Old Dog. I didn't ask and I didn't want to know where or how he got it. Aha, but we were the talk of the flight-line! His personal weapon was an M-79 chunker lashed to an M-16. He handed me a Car 15. A beautiful weapon that could be secured on the survival vest. It also fit perfectly on the Huey pilot's door by placing the muzzle in the leather hand grip and then sliding the stock onto the triangle window's bottom sill. Mike and I were on first name basis when flying. Captain P, our brand-new in country, platoon leader didn't like the informality and chewed out Mike (but not me) for it. So, from that point on Mike referred to me as Mister Dizzy, and I to him, as Mister Mike. The Captain didn't know how to handle the "Mr. Dizzy" routine but I was then reprimanded using the title Mister when referring to an enlisted man. Mike was invited to crew for the gun platoon, the Jokers. He accepted. He crewed for Captain Ed Bilbrey. Mike was medivaced out of country as the results of wounds and injuries received his aircraft was shot down on 11 March 1970. Captain Bilbrey was killed in that action. There is some question as to what happened to them. Some say they were hit with an PRG and some say they just received a heavy volume of fire which killed Ed in the air. Ed was the only one that died. Mike was wounded and unconscious in the wreck for some time but was eventually rescued.

SP5 David E. Easton was killed in an aviation related incident at XD677457 while serving with the 5th Mech. Please report details to the VHPA.

SP5 John T. Lockhart was killed in Laos while serving with a unit in the 1st Avn Bde. Please report details to the VHPA.

12 Mar -

13 Mar - VHPA member Howard "Mo" Modjeski, DUSTOFF 13 from the 498thMed Co, describes a unique mission as follows:

We had several days of dawn to dusk flying. DUSTOFF flight operations generally ceased after usable daylight because the weather typically deteriorated after sunset. Never the less Khe Sanh DUSTOFF became the source for medical evacuation for all the American troops protecting our flank on the Vietnamese side of the border all the way to FSB Vandergriff. We had already gone to bed, when one of the RTO's standing watch on the Khe Sanh DUSTOFF radio woke me. Vandergriff had an urgent American patient, a kid that had an accident with some ordnance and severely injured his leg and was in danger of losing the leg, he could not wait until morning. The weather was terrible. It was after midnight and Khe Sanh was zero zero. The people at Vandergriff convinced me they had a ceiling over the FSB, not the fogged in condition that existed at Khe Sanh. I woke the rest of the crew and we cranked and hovered out to the active in the fog. We prepared for an instrument take off. I remember getting the aircraft light on the skids, aligning the aircraft with runway 27, setting the heading bug on my RMI, and thinking this is for real. I asked Dave to stay with me on the controls and we executed a textbook ITO. It worked! We broke out on top about 800 feet AGL. We turned east and headed for Vandergriff above the overcast. The overcast lay just below the ridge lines surrounding Vandergriff right up to the face of the ridges. We employed a trick we used a lot down in the

498th AO. We coordinated through Vandergriff with a nearby artillery base to put up Arty flares over Vandergriff. Winds were light and drift minimal. We had them put a minimum of three flares in the air at one time to guarantee continuous illumination. We used the flares as a reference point to stay within the ridge lines surrounding Vandergriff and descended through the overcast circling the flares. We broke out under the overcast and landed VFR at the Vandergriff pad marked by flashlights and picked up our patient. They had not exaggerated the situation. This kid was badly hurt and in danger of losing his leg. We departed Vandergriff and climbed back up through the overcast on a heading of the long axis of the valley where Vandergriff was located.

Our challenges only began when we headed east to the hospital at Quang Tri. The winter monsoon was in full blossom in the coastal region and the weather at Quang Tri was not good. We punched into solid IMC just east of the ridge lines bordering Vandergriff. We contacted Quang Tri approach control and requested a GCA into Quang Tri. I remember they gave us a turn to the south upon initial contact. I was flying, and made one of the classically dumb moves. I reached down for my approach plate book in the middle of the turn and gave myself a severe case of the "leans". I asked Dave to take the aircraft, but the abrupt attitude changes I had induced only served to worsen his case of vertigo. I remember thinking, "I refuse to roll this up in a ball and become a bad accident story because of a little spatial disorientation". I took back the controls flying the attitude indicator despite the conflict in my inner ear and settling down to some fairly respectable instrument flying. We shot the full GCA pattern from the west at Quang Tri. I remember shooting the final approach and the GCA controller announcing, "You are at GCA minimums take over visually and land". I remember telling him to keep talking, we could not see the runway and we did not have enough fuel to get to Da Nang or Phu Bai. He talked us down to 15 feet over the runway centerline threshold. I asked Dave to turn on the search light and point it straight down. At that point we got a fix on the runway and hover taxi'd our way to the hospital.

14 Mar - VHPA member Howard "Mo" Modjeski, DUSTOFF 13 from the 498thMed Co, describes another unique mission as follows:

The next morning we were asked to take a group of patients being evacuated out of country out to the hospital ship *Repose* before returning to Khe Sanh. The request peaked my interest since I had not yet landed on a ship. I later found the mission had an additional bonus. Bruce Marshall the flight school classmate that had been shot down and wounded covering me on a mission into Laos days earlier was one of the patients. I was extremely relieved to see Bruce still had his leg and the prognosis was good he would make a complete recovery. When I first saw him after we picked him up in Laos I was concerned he would lose the leg. Had he known it was my first trip to a hospital ship at sea he might have opted for another flight. The mission briefing was unusual. They did not give us the position of the ship. Instead operations at Quang Tri hospital instructed us to fly the 090 bearing outbound from the Quang Tri NDB for twenty minutes. At that time we were to call the ship on a specific UHF frequency and we would be given vectors to the ship. Instructions were simple enough, but it had not dawned on me how far out to sea you would get in twenty minutes. About the time land completely disappeared from the horizon in back of us the engine instruments and caution panels got an increasing amount of our attention. In fact, they became the most monitored instruments on the instrument panel.

Twenty minutes rolled by and I really expected to be able to see the Repose somewhere on the horizon. No Joy. We dutifully made the radio call on the assigned frequency. I was half hoping no one would answer so we could turn around and go back to dry land. Ditching a Huey with four litter and several ambulatory patients was not a very welcome thought. The Repose answered our call and gave us a new heading to the northeast. Again I was not amused by a course that took us farther out to sea. I pressed for an ETA. Repose gave us a new frequency and declared, "Radar Contact". They gave us few more turns and then advised the ship was at our 10 o'clock ten miles. I later learned all of the headings and frequency changes was an effort to confuse the North Vietnamese controllers and keep the ships position a secret. The landing pad controller came on the air and gave us landing instructions. They might as well have been Greek, full of terms like amidships, starboard quarter, etc. I explained I knew left, right, the bow was the pointy end, the back was the end with the wake, please explain where you want me to land in language a land lubber can understand.

After new instructions more suitable for an Army aviator, we made an approach to the pad at the stern. We came to a hover over the pad and learned we had a new skill to develop, land on a moving target. The deck had a slight pitch and roll, in addition to an up and down motion of about four or five feet. It also took a moment to learn that the distant horizon was the point of reference necessary to hover, otherwise, the close in horizon wave motion and the moving deck proved to be disorienting. We also quickly deduced we wanted to make contact with the deck at the top of its oscillation or on the way down. If we had not got the skids down by the time the deck changed directions we were going to come back with a spread set of skids and some bad backs. I got the aircraft down without bending anything permanently. The Navy controllers advised comedy wasn't pretty. We were invited to get a tour of the ship but I was not enthused with the prospect of having a mechanical problem with the aircraft and being stuck on the ship. About that time some of the prettiest nurses I ever saw showed up in hospital whites with the deck crew to unload our patients. I immediately regretted my decision for an declining the tour of the ship. We returned without incident, but I am still not a fan of extended overwater operation in a single engine aircraft.

15 Mar - WO1 Steven R. Peck died of wounds received during an in- country check-ride in an OH-58A. He was assigned to the 5th Mech and the incident occurred in the vicinity of the Rock Pile at XD694405. Peck received a 51 cal in the chest. The CE was Jim Carlsen.

16 Mar - B/4/77th ARA lost AH-1G #66-15310 and crew (CPT Charles D. Allen and CPT Loyd V. McCarthy). The VHPA KIA database says they stopped to refuel at Quang Tri and tried to beat the weather. They crashed four or five Ks south of Quan Tri.

17 Mar - The 1st Bde, 5th Mech lost OH-58 #68-16884 at XD779438 about 1400 hours. 1LT William D. Schlutter was the pilot and LTC Bryan J. Sutton (CO of 3/187 INF) and MAJ Ronald O. Scharnberg (Opns Officer of 3/187 INF) were passengers. Into Laos, pages 326 through 328, provides details about this Infantry Battalion's mission of searching for the NVA between the Rockpile and the Laotian border. A survey team from the 108th Artillery Group reported an aircraft burning on a mountain near them. D Troop 3/5th Cav was notified and sent a VR team to the area. The aircraft was located and found to be completely destroyed. The three bodies were recovered.

18 Mar - The 71st AHC sent five Hueys (four log birds and one high ship) to help resupply the ARVN Marine Bde 147 on FSB DELTA and ? to resupply the ARVN Marine Bde 258 on FSB HOTEL. VHPA member Doug Womack recalls:

Jim Fulbrook and I flew the high bird that day with the job of rescuing anyone from our company that was shot down. By this time DELTA was an "old FSB". The NVA had it completely surrounded and ringed with anti-air defenses. There were at least three 51-cal weapons just outside the perimeter. I remember during the third approach into DELTA seeing three sets of green tracers crossing in front of us just like some John Wayne movie. They didn't hit us but that wasn't our biggest problem - mortars were our biggest problem. The 71st attempted several resupply sorties into DELTA with four ships each. Heavily loaded and less maneuverables, the resupply crews aborted. We tried all sorts of different techniques to trick the NVA. Each ship would drop off supplies and try to remove some of their wounded. The NVA small arms fire around the perimeter scored lots of hits but they could walk their mortars across the LZ before you could get many loaded. After the last ship departed for each sortie, we'd drop in for a load of wounded rather than go back to refuel with an empty ship. We'd fly a zig-zag approach to try to fool the NVA mortar crews. The ARVN had three or four different places where a Huey could pick up their wounded. One of our tricks was to have them pop smoke on the upper location and then we'd land at the one down just off the ridge. We became convinced that one of the things that was helping us was the cuts in the ground washed by the rains running off. Normally on flat ground a mortar round would explode and send its shrapnel out in almost a perfect hemisphere. Since the rain had cut grooves in the ground and a mortar round would explode a little below the surface thus only sending shrapnel at a reduced arc above. During our second time in the LZ we were waiting for a seriously wounded guy when a mortar exploded just a short distance from our left door but we didn't take a hit. Another trick was to land at one point, remain there a second or two - long enough for the NVA to swing their tubes to our position; then hover over to the intended pick-up point. At dusk that day they were really desperate for medevacs, so Jim Fulbrook and I went back in for the third time. We waited just a little too long because our gunner took some shrapnel in his hand from a mortar. A strange thing happened during climb out. It was as if the NVA had decided to let us go free - no one fired at us. Earlier in the afternoon I was over HOTEL when Ed Albrick started coming out in #66-15742. It was always like an elevator ride when you moved off one of the cliffs at the edge of a FSB because there were such strong up drafts. Anyway, Ed was just lifting off when a mortar round exploded beneath his tail boom. From the position of the blast I believe it must have passed right through his main rotor blades. The resulting blast literally blew him off the LZ and into this up draft. All totaled we had four Hueys take major battle damaged that day.

D/101 Avn lost AH-1G #68-15077 at XD469392 and crew (CPT Keith A. Brandt and 1LT Alan B. Boffman). The MIA synopsis reports:

During the ARVN withdrawal, a unit was trapped in a crater and requested assistance. CPT Brandt came on standing leading a flight of Cobra gunships in response to the C&C request for assistance by any helicopters. The ARVN on the ground radioed to Brandt "We are completely surrounded" and asked him to expend his ordnance on his smoke. The rest of the afternoon Brandt and Boffman stayed over this unit. They returned to Khe Sanh for refueling and rearming three times. They expended ordnance as directed by the ARVN sergeant on the radio and dodged NVA

fire on their low-level flights to pinpoint the exact ARVN location and to calculate the best approach route for the rescue helicopters. At nearly 5 p.m., the 173rd AHC Robinhoods began coming in from the east to extract the besieged ARVN. Brandt was still circling and volunteered to lead the helicopters up as the ARVN had expended their last smoke grenades some hours earlier. He radioed: "This is Music 16, follow me, Robinhood 3, and I'll lead you to the friendlies." As they moved in, the NVA fire exploded around them. Brandt's Cobra shuddered and he radioed, "I've lost my engine and my transmission is breaking up. Good-bye. Send my love to my family. I'm dead." Then the Cobra became a ball of fire and crashed in the trees. With knots in their throats, the extraction helicopters continued their mission. Of the original 420 ARVN who entered Laos, only 88 were left. They had fought hard for six weeks. The helicopters were clearly overloaded and some had great difficulty staying airborne on the trip back to Khe Sanh. ARVN were hanging from the skids of the aircraft in a desperate attempt to reach the safety of Vietnam. Many fell, some were injured on landing. Of the 88 at the crater, only 36 made it back to Khe Sanh. The remains of both pilots were returned in July, 1990.

SP5 Russell G. Ahrens of the 571st Med Det was killed at XD578427 while on a mission in Laos. This information was provided by the Dustoff Association. Please report details to the VHPA.

The 14th CAB's ORLL reported:

From the 18th until the 23rd of March, the Battalion (-) was engaged in the resupplying and finally the extraction of LZ Delta and LZ Delta 1. From the start to finish enemy anti-aircraft fire, mortars and small arms fire from around the LZ's made resupplying virtually impossible. The lack of aircraft availability was again supplemented by assets of the 116th and 176th, which arrived on the 20th, Quang Tri and departed on the 24th of March for Chu Lai.

19 Mar - The 48th AHC lost UH-1C #65-09489 at XD585428 and crew (CW2 Frederick L. Cristman, AC, WO1 Jon M. Sparks, pilot, Ricardo M. Garcia, CE, all missing, and SP4 Paul Lagenour, gunner, repatriated). The MIA synopsis reports:

The UH-1C gunship was covering a downed U.S. helicopter during a rescue effort. The LZ was under fire, and the pilot of the downed craft was a buddy of Fred's. He worked the area with his minigun while another helicopter successfully extracted the pilot. Cristman and his crew continued to work the hot LZ while other helicopters came in. His gunship was hit, crashed into the ARVN perimeter, and was hit on the roof by a mortar round just as the crew jumped out. Cristman, his copilot, and the crew chief were thrown to the ground, while the door gunner, SP4 Lagenour, reached safety. The others remained with the chopper.

VHPA member Ed Newton remembers:

Jon Sparks came to the 48th the same week as I did in October, 1970. We were roommates at Ninh Hoa and were assigned to the 2nd platoon initially but then I was transferred to maintenance. I still flew with the slick platoons whenever I could to build flight time. Sparky moved over to the guns just before the move up north. The morning he was to take off on a search and destroy mission was foggy. Their take off was delayed and Sparky called me on the

FM to come out and check a bearing on the rotor head. It was worn but within limits so I told him we'd replace it that night. Since no one was launching, we had a smoke on the sandbag revetment alongside the helicopter. He told me that his two week leave had just been approved and he was going home to see his wife (1st wedding anniversary). He also said that he didn't think he was going to return from today's mission. I told him to go on sick call if he felt strongly about it. He said he couldn't because there were so few qualified gun pilots available and besides it would put someone else at risk. That afternoon we received word that 489 had been shot down while covering a rescue mission. There was very heavy anti-aircraft fire in the area but the helicopter autorotated to a small hill top. During the one fly-by, which was attempted in spite of the heavy AA, both pilot doors could be seen jettisoned on the ground by the helicopter. Eleven days later Paul Lagenour, the door gunner, crossed the American lines into South Vietnam. With the assistance of ARVN troops, he E&Ed through Laos. In the hospital he told our CO that the helicopter had been shot down and all survived. They came under heavy fire during a ground attack from the NVA and a mortar round landed on the helicopter. Paul was knocked unconscious and when he awoke during the night the NVA were stripping the helicopter. He played dead until they left and crawled out of the wreckage during darkness. He did not know what happened to the other crew members. A rescue mission could not be mounted the day they were shot down due to darkness. The next day the crash site was overflowed by our guns but no one could be seen. There were no ELT signals. It was assumed the crew was killed until Lagenour showed up eleven days later.

20 Mar - The ARVN 1st Armor Bde was still working their way east on Route 9 through the NVA ambushes. VHPA member Joel Dozhier remembers:

I was lead for a two ship DUSTOFF mission along the road. I landed to the ground and was mobbed with about 40 ARVNs. I pulled pitch but we didn't move. I yelled at the guys in the back to get some off. I remember looking back to see the CE kick one in the face. They even fired weapons over the heads and cut guys with a knife. I got out with 29 on board and told the second ship that they were "pack ratting us". When the second ship left I asked how many he had; answer - 12. He didn't land to the ground. We made two more trips each that afternoon. Finally we were told not to go in anymore because only the healthy ones rather than their wounded were getting on our ship. The commanders wanted them to drive their vehicles out rather than abandon them.

B/101st Avn lost UH-1H #66-16185 at XD515352 and crew (MAJ Jack L. Barker, CPT John F. Dugan, SP4 William E. Dillender, and PFC John J. Chubb). Maj Barker was Color 6 during Lam Son 719. He had been the company commander since January. Dugan was Kingsman 16. Their bodies were not recovered. The following are two "eyewitness statements" prepared by 1LT John F. Evans that came to the VHPA from the "Kingsmen Scrapbook":

The individuals names on the preceding page (editor's note: the names of 12 officers and 12 enlisted men were presented) comprised the crews of ten UH-1H aircraft, seven from Bravo Company and three from Charlie Company of the 101st Avn Bn in the emergency extraction of a battalion size ARVN force that was in heavy contact and in danger of being over run by the enemy near FSB BROWN. For the past three days the South Vietnamese forces had been under heavy contact with the enemy and it was decided to extract all the forces left in the area. Our

mission was the extraction of four battalions in and around FSB BROWN. Our flight was the third flight scheduled to go into the PZ for the extraction. All of the preceding aircraft were taking intense ground fire and heavy automatic weapons fire downing at least six of the aircraft before we arrived in the area. On the second attempt into the PZ, the lead aircraft again received heavy automatic weapons fire some of which hit in and around the cockpit causing him to make another go-around. Chalk 2 also received the same intense ground fire hitting his aircraft in the same area destroying the majority of his engine instruments which caused him to break off the approach. On climb out his aircraft was hit again with several air-bursts that caused him to make an emergency landing on FSB DELTA ONE. Chalks 3 and 4 received several hits on short final but elected to take their aircraft on into the PZ for a load of troops. Both aircraft received severe automatic weapons fire on departure but were able to avoid the majority of the fire. Chalk 5 was on short final, about 100 meters from the PZ, when he was hit by a RPG causing him to crash in the trees just short of the PZ. Due to the intense fire, Chalk 6 was forced to make another go-around. Chalks 7, 8, and 9 were also forced to abort the landing due to the number of hits their aircraft took and they returned to Khe Sanh. Chalk 10 was orbiting around FSB DELTA ONE and went to the aid of Chalk 5. Like the others, Chalk 10 received the same heavy automatic weapons fire on short final but continued to the downed aircraft which by this time had been surrounded by enemy forces. He hovered over the downed aircraft, returning the enemy fire, until all the injured crew members were safely on board. He departed the area under murderous fire and flew his crippled aircraft, with its wounded crew, back to Khe Sanh. By this time Chalk 6 was on long final to DELTA ONE to extract the crew of Chalk 2 downed earlier. As the fire base was taking intense mortar fire, he circled the base until there was a brief pause and he went in. On short final he received heavy small arms fire which continued even after touch down. After getting the downed crew safely aboard, he departed the fire base with mortars landing on either side of his departure path. Chalks 3 and 4 deposited their troops on the LZ at Ham Ngai and went back to the PZ for a second sortie. On short final they experienced even more ground fire than before as well as having heavy mortar fire impacting on the PZ. Both pilots tried to maneuver their aircraft into the PZ, but were hit so extensively by the ground fire that they were forced to return to Khe Sanh where their aircraft were later slung back to be repaired. After having his aircraft badly damaged in the previous attempts, our Commander switched aircraft and attempted a third sortie into the same area. He was on short final to the PZ when his aircraft was struck by a suspected RPG causing it to explode in the air and crash into the trees in a ball of flames. "I Swear The Above Is True" signed Jon F. Evans, 1LT, Inf

On 20 March, SP4 Dillender and PFC Chubb were in the sixth aircraft of the third element of the flight consisting of ten UH- 1Hs. It was known that all three PZs were surrounded by enemy troops, so that there was no axis of approach which could be used to avoid enemy ground fire. Shortly after the element launched and headed toward the PZ, the aircraft flew through the white phosphorus smoke to allow maximum concealment from enemy antiaircraft gunners. Upon breaking out of the smoke they learned that the first five aircraft of the element were receiving fire and as their aircraft began its final approach, it too began taking enemy fire. SP4 Dillender and PFC Chubb immediately returned a high volume of accurate machine-gun fire but the enemy fire was too intense to land in the PZ and the aircraft made a go-around. The aircraft then rejoined the flight for another attempt to land at the PZ. As the aircraft started its second approach, the enemy fire was even more intense, but they again immediately returned fire at the enemy positions with such accuracy that their aircraft took no hits. On short final, they saw the

aircraft in front of theirs crash into the trees just short of the PZ. By quickly relaying the location of the downed aircraft to their own aircraft commander, they materially assisted in the quick retrieval of the injured crew. As their aircraft continued toward the PZ, the intensity of the enemy fire again increased and forced a second go-around. At this time it was learned that the second aircraft in the flight had made a forced landing at Fire Support Base DELTA ONE, two miles to the east. FSB DELTA ONE was surrounded by the enemy and was under heavy attack, but with no thought of their own safety, they began an approach to pick up the downed crew. Mortars were impacting on the fire base and enemy small arms fire was heavy, but undaunted, SP4 Dillender and PFC Chubb placed accurate return fire upon the enemy, killing several of them. As soon as the downed crew had jumped aboard and the aircraft started to lift off, mortars began falling on both sides of the aircraft. They continued firing on the enemy as their aircraft departed the fire base. The aircraft returned to Khe Sanh and was found to have taken only two minor hits, due to the extremely effective fire placed upon the enemy by SP4 Dillender and PFC Chubb. Soon after returning to Khe Sanh, they volunteered to make yet another effort to extract the ARVN soldiers, this time with Major Barker and Captain Dugan as the pilots. For the third time, they took off into Laos, this time as the lead aircraft of the element, now reduced to only three helicopters. As the aircraft began its final approach, heavy enemy fire again filled the air. SP4 Dillender and PFC Chubb returned a high volume of machine-gun fire. But on short final, an RPG struck the aircraft and the helicopter began to disintegrate and fall to the earth where it exploded in a ball of flame, killing all aboard. "I Swear The Above Is True" signed Jon F. Evans, 1LT, Inf

VHPA member Ed Newton, a maintenance officer in the 48th AHC, remembers:

Like many guys, I wrote letters to the lady I would marry after returning from Vietnam. Luckily, Dot (Dorothy) kept them all. In preparing this material for the VHPA Directory, she and I got them out for the first time in years and reread them again. It was neat to see all the "I love you's" and "I miss you's" and "Thanks for the food packages." These letters, naturally, help date events and include interesting facts and figures that I have long since forgotten. I'd forgotten that she used to send me light bulbs but I remembered the cookies. Being based at Dong Ha was no fun. It was wet and muddy and we were at the end of a very long supply line. Lots of things we put requisitions in for were not available or were snatched by someone along the line. We resorted to writing home and requesting the items we needed. Dot sent me weekly care packages, which included razors, writing paper, food, and even light bulbs. We couldn't get light bulbs at first so I wrote for an emergency supply. Dot packed a half dozen and shipped them. There was about a two week turn around time between my letter and the arrival of her package. The bulbs were used in our maintenance area and sleeping tents. In my comments made earlier in this history, I related how the 48th had moved to Dong Ha and how I came to be in the Maintenance Platoon. All the Maintenance Platoon pilots were assigned to fly with the 1st and 2nd platoons for the initial insertions. I say initial because it soon became apparent that combat damage would be higher than we expected. Our tactics of flying 1500' AGL in trail formation resulted in four ships being shot down the first day (8 Feb). This included CPT Cole and CW2 Dixon in our pristine maintenance UH-1H. A downed ship recovery program was immediately implemented - within the first week of Lam Son 719 I'd guess. The 223rd CAB tasked the 48th and 173rd to provide one UH-1H each day dedicated to the recovery of helicopters downed in Laos.

A typical mission would depart Dong Ha between 0700 and 0800 and fly to either Khe Sanh and Lang Vei. The normal crew of four would be joined by a recovery team of three or four maintenance EM with sling gear. The team members all wore helmets and flak vests and carried extra weapons and ammo. The weapons included side arms, M16s, M79s, Thompson submachine guns and even an old Burp (Grease) Gun. Where these guys obtained those weapons, I don't know but they sure didn't mind lugging them around. On board the helicopter, the crew took extra cans of ammo for the M60s plus water and C rats and TA50 gear for RONS at Khe Sanh. With all this on board, we were often flying around near max gross weight. In the beginning of Lam Son 719, we flew out into the AO single ship with a light team of Charlie Model guns. That lasted about a week or two- until there weren't enough of them to go around anymore. At that point, we flew out to the downed helicopter alone with "guns on call." Each day there was at least one mission assigned by command forward. We would be given the coordinates, tactical situation, assets available to us (guns and hooks) plus the radio freqs to use. If the downed helicopter had been on the ground overnight, an EOD team would be flown out ahead of us to clear the area and helicopter of mines and/or booby traps. That's it. We were on our own and ran our own show. My procedure was to fly out to the coordinates at high altitude and look over the area and helicopter with binoculars. If everything looked OK, we'd check in with the C&C and guns on call and then go in to drop off the recovery team. We would take off and fly a racetrack pattern above the site so as not to draw mortar fire and to look for movement of the NVA in the area. When the helicopter was rigged, I would call for a CH-47 and guns to come in for the "pick." The CH-47s came either from Lang Vei or Khe Sanh or were on a return from a resupply drop. This was the toughest part. Coordinating the hook and guns and then hoping they wouldn't draw fire as they were pulling the bird out. Most of the hook drivers were good but they never seemed to listen to their radios or to my recovery team leader who was on the ground with a PRC-25. UH-1Hs and AH-1Gs were the main ships to be recovered. The old UH-1Cs were basically written off as obsolete and not worth recovering. The Snakes were tricky to sling and needed a drough chute, which were in short supply. Once the bird was hooked out, I would go in and pull the recovery team out. Sometime they had time to check out the area around the downed bird and would come back with NVA weapons and intell info which we passed on. Who said there were no GIs on Laotian soil? One afternoon (from my letters I'd date this about Mar 20th and I was assigned to fly to a hilltop that had four disabled UH-1Hs on it. We were single ship that day with "guns on call." I flew my team, led by SP5 Dean, to look for the NVA near the aircraft and to determine which, if any, of the downed birds were recoverable. Three looked to be in good shape. So I landed and dropped off my team, then took off to orbit as per the procedure I just described. As the team was rigging the first helicopter, the ground erupted with exploding mortar rounds. I could see tube flashes on an adjacent ridge line and radioed for support from my "on call guns." Unfortunately, they were occupied at the moment escorting some CH-47s on a resupply mission. Luckily, an Air Force FAC was listening and asked if he could help. He had two F-4s inbound with 500lb bombs and napalm and was looking for a target. I gave him the coordinates and he let loose some marker rockets for the F-4s. They made two runs and silenced the mortars. It was beautiful! The recovery team rigged three helicopters and the CH-47s "hooked" them out. The Army records show 92 helicopters were lost during Lam Son 719. Well, John Wallace and I figure our maintenance recovery crew rigged and "slung out" 45 to 50 ships from Laos during the operation. John was shot down with CW2 Pete Ward in 69-15141 on March 4th. They both survived and are still flying today. The 173rd also lost a UH-1H while flying a maintenance recovery mission. I wrote recommendations for awards

for our recovery teams. They never received any - to do so, I am guessing, would be an admission of American soldiers on the ground in Laos.

VHPA member Ed Newton, a maintenance officer in the 48th AHC, describes the maintenance activities back at their base camp:

Back in Dong Ha, the Maintenance Platoon went into a two shift 24 hour operation. Our civilian sheet metal workers (contractors with DyneLectron) were always busy repairing bullet holes and plexiglas. Battle damage to wire bundles was brutal. The electricians were great performing this tedious repair work. Parts were in short supply; a situation exacerbated by the fact that we were at the end of the supply line. Cannibalization was mandatory and parts swapping between companies was normal. My flight school and AMOC classmate, Bill Finney, was stationed at Quang Tri with B/7/1st Cav. We would call each other on company FM and check for spares from "O" rings to 540 rotor heads. On at least six occasions, I flew (via C130 or C-7s) to other companies in Vietnam with one of our TIs to pick up a replacement helicopter. In every case, the maintenance officer from that unit gave me extra parts to bring back north. One Cav unit which was standing down gave me two 540 rotor heads. With the help of my TI, the 540s were placed on two old mattresses on the cargo floor and tied down. Finney got one of those 540s. One of the helicopters I flew to Dong Ha was brand new. CW2 Jesse Dize, whose ship 879 reached 3600 hours and was retrograded, was assigned the new aircraft. He was shot down in Laos on its first mission! The straw which almost broke our back was the unannounced arrival of six AH-1Gs in early April. It was after Lam Son 719 had ended. The Army had decided to replace our UH-1Cs which had all been shot down or were unflyable due to battle damage. According to my records, 24 helicopters were lost by the 48th during Lam Son 719; 12 destroyed and 12 retrograded. Every retrograde, save CW2 Dize's 879, was due to battle damage. No doubt the flight platoon crews were courageous, but the maintenance platoon members were equally awesome. We kept them flying in safe aircraft so they could come home.

21 Mar - C/7/17th Cav lost an AH-1G crew (WO1 David C. Lancaster and WO1 James W. Manthei). Into Laos mentions this incident on page 312. VHPA member 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 APC 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 got everyone sorted out enough to start shooting at the ambushers. The NVA were squared away and had positioned at least three 51 cal's in a nice triangle to cover their forces. These 51 cal's start in on us. We stop shooting at the ambushers and start in on the 51 cal's. 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 med evac 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!

VHPA member Jesse Dize, who flew with the 48th AHC, offers these observations:

I feel impressed to say a few words about our CO, Major Bunting. Several of us in the 48th had the opinion that the army did not consider Major "B" to be the command type and had stuck him at a desk. When his predecessor was shot and medivaced, Major "B" was the only "qualified" officer available. I think the "S" and "G" staffs hated him, but we, at least the Blue Star warrant officers, loved him. If I had ever had a son, his middle name would have been "Bunting." I have never had more respect for any man than I have for Major Bunting. In later years, I had the privilege having the Major, now a Colonel (retired), pin on my Master Warrant bars. The Major was not one to climb up to altitude, like so many other the commanders, and then direct an assault from the air-conditioned comfort of 5000 feet. He would be right down in the dirt, leading the charge. Major Bunting lead by example with seeming disregard for his own personal safety. His style of leadership also got him shot down on at least two occasions. However, because of his self sacrifice and his obvious deep regard and concern for his men, Major Bunting instilled a loyalty in the men of the 48th AHC that was strong as steel and as enduring as rock. To this day, if "The Major" was to call we would, without question, coming running. On one occasion, because of the poor and cowardly performance of the ARVNs, most of the pilots refused to fly. Instead of have a display of emotion and making threats "The Major" said that he understood and, in fact, agreed with the pilots, but that as the Commander, he had to do his duty and had no choice but to go, and he left. When his aircraft has heard cranking, a cry when up, "we can't let him go it alone" and all scheduled pilots stumbled down to our respective aircraft and followed him into Laos.

22 Mar - PVT Karl Druzinsky was killed in the crash of a HHT/2/17 UH-1H #69-15403. VHPA member Steve Powers describes the event as follows:

We had been taking artillery fire for over a week at Khe Sanh. The guns were so close you could hear the report, the whistle, and even tell if they would be long or short. Then there were the ones that didn't go off and some poor guy had to dig them up, and there were lots of them. It seemed that whenever the weather broke the shelling would stop and we could get out and look for the guns. Maybe it was the other way around - we looked, they stopped. On the 22nd, we were returning to Khe Sanh after another unsuccessful search. We called the tower to see if they had taken any incoming lately, after a negative we set up an approach for the strip just outside the 2/17 Cav's TOC. LTC Archie Rider had just taken over the squadron and was being broken in fast. On short final a round exploded about 200 yards in front of us. The crew chief, can't remember his name, was already coming forward when I pulled pitch and nosed it over. The next round went right through us. I couldn't get out my side, but one long step put me out the right side next to LTC Rider and the crew chief. The gunner, Karl Druzinsky, never made it out. He

was an interesting guy. In our early days at Khe Sanh we used shape charges to blow our trenches and holes for bunkers and he found an old Marine 50 cal. He cleaned it up and worked and worked on it until it fired again. I still have pictures of the two of us doing something around the C&C ship. The crew chief was wounded in the leg and couldn't move so the Col. and I dragged him to the nearest bunker and lobbed him in. Now this whole happening took only a few heart beats, hard and fast but only a few, and by the time we got to the bunker the ship, 403, was already completely consumed in fire. All the ammo from the 60's along with the grenades we kept aboard were cooking off and this thing that was just flying was now turning to coals before my eyes - just that fast! You know how you are sort of numb and just doing what needs to get done then everything settles down and you get a second to realize what just happened and then it hits? It wasn't long before I couldn't stand without holding on. That night we were hit with a sapper attack - another war story. The next day I chopped out the last three numbers, 403, with an entrenching tool. I still have them out in the bar. Hardly anyone sees them, let alone knows what they are - sort of like some of us - wouldn't you say?

The 176th AHC lost UH-1H #68-15759 at XD666365 and crew (WO1 Reginald Cleve, AC, WO1 John G. Traver, pilot, SP4 Donald P. Knutsen, CE, and Walter R. Hall, gunner). The MIA synopsis reports:

The families of the men aboard the UH-1H were given the following account: that this helicopter was part of a flight of five helicopter conducting an emergency resupply mission when the helicopter burst into flames and crashed. The aircraft was flying at an altitude of about 5,000 feet above sea level in Savannakhet Province, Laos, when it was fired upon by a hostile ground force and an explosion occurred in the cargo compartment. The helicopter impacted essentially in one piece and again exploded and continued to burn. No one was observed to exit the aircraft, and it was the opinion of the investigating committee that no one could have survived. No rescue attempts were made due to the heavy concentration of enemy troops and the anti-aircraft fire in the area. A family member of one of the crew states, "one reason for our feeling that he may still be alive is that his aircraft was hit, and he radioed to the leader of the mission that he would be forced to land. The remainder of the aircraft went on to deliver their cargoes, and as they returned to their base, they reportedly passed over this site. They saw (the downed helicopter) on the ground, but there was NOT any fire, nor did they see any of the men around it."

VHPA member Scott Reed, who served with the 176th, remembers:

I was a Musket in the gun platoon for the 176th AHC, the Minutemen. It seems to me that we went up north to help out a couple of days before Reg was killed and stayed a couple more after that. I was rearming at Khe Sanh when I heard that they had gone down. They were attempting a parachute resupply of the northern most DELTA FSB. I have heard three different stories about how they died. One says that they were hit at 5,000 feet by anti-aircraft fire and exploded. Another that another slick followed them down but they exploded before they hit the ground. The third that they just seem to loose power and went in without attempting to flare for landing. I'd like to know the correct story. To the best of my knowledge, this was the only loss the 176th took in Lam Son 719. I have several memories of those days. I remember being at Chu Lai and looking at the cover of Newsweek with "The Helicopter War" on it when the phone rang saying we were going up north for the second time. Because of Lam Son 719, the 116th and the 176th

had to cover an AO from the southern end of I Corps to Da Nang. When the call came for us to go up north for awhile, the 116th and the 176th each contributed about 5 or 6 slicks and at least a heavy team of guns. I did not go up the first time during the initial push into Laos, but I did the second time. We slept in our ships at Quang Tri the entire time I was there. I remember once returning to Khe Sanh and called critical fuel. I was told we were number 3 for critical fuel. Things were crazy there. I remember commenting to someone that flying in Laos was like some pictures from a Mad Magazine where little action events are happening all around. A Chinooks doing something, a set of guns working here, a C&C over here, on and on. I also remember being told to change tactics by the Sharks and other Charlie model gun outfits. No low level stuff, you'd just get shot down for certain. I also remember refueling at Lang Vie. That place was spooky - no perimeter, no nothing. Just some place they had scraped clear of vegetation and established as a forward base.

23 Mar - VHPA member Bob Bearer flew Chinooks all during Lam Son 719 and provides these observations:

My company did not loose anyone which was very fortunate considering all the flying we did. I remember we often picking up wounded and KIAs to take to Dong Hai. Sometime we took wounded to a Navy hospital ship the SS San (something) just off shore. We had no comms and the Navy guys would signal with flags and lights but this didn't mean anything to us. It was a pretty scary to land on that ship because their landing pad wasn't designed for a helicopter as big as a Chinook. They had a lower antenna farm relatively near the pad that always concerned me. Without our guys in the back we would never have been able to land there. The ship was usually pitching. When we were on the pad correctly, we had the thrust lever down and the brakes on and the cockpit was over the water. If something went wrong, we'd be in the drink before we knew it. That was very uncomfortable! To their credit, though, the ship was organized to receive our wounded in about three or four minutes and there was never any back haul - so when we were unloaded, we were up and out of there! During part of the operation, I remember we were told not to lock and load our 60s until we were in Laos. Most of us thought that was pretty stupid. Whenever we cranked, we had the guys in the back lock and load their 60s. There were "permission to fire" rules that were difficult to follow when things got tight. We adopted our own rules - if they shot at you, you'd shoot back. I am not aware of any serious problems with "our rules". I'd say one of our most serious problems was getting the ARVN to talk and to tell us where they wanted the loads. A few had guys who could speak English well enough and tried to work with us, but others didn't. Lots of times they'd say there was smoke out where they wanted to load placed, but we didn't see any. We also talk to the guys who had just come out of a base. They'd tell us what worked from them or say we should try something different. I don't remember bringing any tubes back but we did bring ammo back. Again communications was a problem. They wouldn't bother to tell us they had rigged a piggy back load. Our FEs were our saviors. They lay on their stomachs watching the hook through the hole. Most of the time the dust was terrible over those FSBs. We'd try to hook up and hover up to keep the dust problem to a minimum. ITOs were common. I still have a vivid memory of one pickup. We hooked onto the load and were starting an ITO because of the dust. It didn't take long for take up the slack in the 20 foot sling and suddenly the FE yells "It's a piggy back!" I felt the ship go nose low to about 30 degrees. I pulled all we had and tried to punch off the load at the same time. I guess there was too much weight on the hook because it wouldn't release. Fortunately, we climbed just enough to

get a visual view of the situation to pull both loads out. I know another two seconds in the dust and we'd have crashed! Another incident sticks in my mind. We were told to go pick up a Cobra as a priority mission. When we got there, we saw an OH-6A next to it. We told them someone had to move the LOH. The radio operator says "My 6 says come and get the Cobra". We tell him: "No" and this 6 gets on the horn: "I am ordering you to pick up that Cobra!" We said: "You will take full responsibility for the OH-6" - answer "Yes". So we move in the pickup the Cobra. Just as we are pulling out, the FE says: "Well there goes the LOH rolling over a couple of times!" As we left we said: "Well 6 you just bought yourself a LOH!" I never determined why moving that Cobra was so darned important!

24 Mar - The official sources state that four individuals assigned to the 5th Mech (CPT David L. Coker, SGT Harry M. Beckwith, SP4 William E. Neal, and PFC Robert D. Walters) died in an AH-1G at XD668543 in Quang Tri province. This certainly requires some further clarification. Please report any details to the VHPA. VHPA member Dan Grigsby provided a copy of the following statement prepared by the 1st Bde 5th Mech that might help those involved remember:

At approximately 1815 hours on 24 March 1971, a heavy scout team from C Troop, 2d of the 17th Cav contacted a large enemy force in the vicinity of coordinates XD6748. One scout aircraft was shot down. The second scout aircraft maneuvered to determine the fate of the first aircraft and was also shot down. A UH-1H attempted to land elements of the aerial rifle platoon in the vicinity and was also shot down. An AH-1G, attempting to suppress the area, was virtually destroyed by fire from two .51 caliber gun positions. A rifle company was alerted to move and the 71st AHC, which was supporting the brigade, were out on 10 separate support missions. I issued an alert call on the company UHF for all aircraft to assemble for an emergency combat assault. Within 20 minutes, the entire flight was assembled and loaded with troops. These troops were inserted in the vicinity of the downed aircraft in the face of extremely heavy enemy fire. Three of the lift ships sustained disabling hits during the insertion but completed the mission and limped back to B Med at Khe Sanh to drop off their wounded. Some of these crews eventually obtained replacement aircraft and rejoined the action. At about the same time that the first insertion was taking place, a platoon from the 4th of the 3d encountered extremely heavy contact in an area approximately 40 kilometers away. It was readily apparent that reinforcements were necessary to prevent annihilation of this small unit. The flight was contacted and diverted in the air to the Pick-up Zone where they airlifted a platoon sized element into the second contact area. This was accomplished under heavy fire. The troops in the first contact area were again so heavily engaged that it was necessary to redirect the flight to reinforce the ground troops which were inserted earlier. This was accomplished expeditiously and the flight refueled, rearmed, and then returned to the second contact area to finish the insertion there. By this time the ground force had reached the downed aircraft in the first contact area, so the flight was called in to extract the dead and wounded. After this was completed, they extracted the company. The hostile fire was so heavy that six gunships were used continuously to cover the aircraft going into and coming out of the Landing Zone. Even though sustaining hits each time, the crews continued repeatedly until all personnel were extracted. One helicopter, Rattler 11 (Ed Albrick) and crew, was particularly noteworthy. His helicopter sustained so many hits that it was literally shot down in flames. The pilot, skillfully, guided the burning aircraft to a stream a bed and sat it down in such a manner, that no one was injured. The entire flight, throughout the day, demonstrated courage and a sense of urgency that credits the United States Army's airmobility concept. It is

difficult to single out individual acts of heroism since the entire flight was one continuous heroic endeavor from morning till night. I recommend that every crewmember, involved in this action, be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his contribution to an effort that undoubtedly averted two disasters. Signed Tommy C. Stiner, MAJ, Inf, Brigade Avn Officer

VHPA member Ed Strazzini, who flew CH-54As for the 478th, continues:

The 478th provided five CH-54s throughout the entire operation and that included the ARVN retrograde when we brought a great deal of their heavy stuff back to Khe Sanh. During one lift of a 5 ton truck out of an ARVN fire base, we were shocked to see a little ARVN soldier appear out from under a tarp in the open cab of the vehicles. We were at that time cruising eastward at about 4,000 feet AGL. We landed him safely at Khe Sanh where military police escorted him away. The 478th lost no personnel nor aircraft during the operation. The official lessons learned said we had eight incidents of battle damage but I can only remember one.

VHPA member Jesse Dize, who flew with the 48th AHC, offers these observations:

Ed Newton provided a short summary of the 48th's aircraft losses. On the human side, all of our KIAs or MIAs, to include one entire crew, came from our gun platoon -- the Jokers. They suffered a lost of four MIA pilots, two KIA pilots, three MIA enlisted crew members and a least one KIA door gunner. Not one slick driver or crewmember was killed or missing. This statistic hit me hard. At Dong Ha, the pilots lived in five men "GP Tiny" tents. I lived with the gunnies even though I was a slick driver. The four other person who were my initial tent-mates were Fred Cristman, Fred Few, Jon Reid, and Joe Marshall. Of the five, only two came home -- Fred Few any I. Joe Marshall was our first loss in Laos -- KIA, another abnormal statistic. Joe didn't have to be there. He was a Canadian. Jon Sparks moved into the tent taking the space that Joe left. Jon Reid and his entire crew was our next loss -- MIA. I also knew his crew chief, Johnson. I had flown his Huey (the crewchief, not the pilot, really owned the aircraft) many times before he moved on to the gun platoon. Next, both Fred Cristman and his copilot, Jon Sparks, and their crewchief became MIAs. Their gunner, Lagnenour, made it out on foot several days later. Fred Few, at least twice, and I were both shot down but survived. Frew also lossed a crewchief -- KIA. Our tent was jinxed. Only the FNGs would move in; because they didn't know any better.

The 14th CAB's ORLL reported that the 71st and 174th AHC's extracted LZ Hotel, with no incidents.

25 Mar - SP4 Larry A. Simonson was killed in Laos while serving as a crew member of a 1st Avn Bde unit. Please report details to the VHPA. He is the last known aviation crew member to be killed in the operation.

26 Mar -

27 Mar -

28 Mar - The 14th CAB's ORLL reported that the 71st AHC went into standown for the return trip to Chu Lai. VHPA member Jesse Dize, who flew with the 48th AHC, offers these observations:

Because of my broken coccyx (tail bone) from being shot down on the 3 Mar, I could not sit for more than an hour or so. Plus, when sitting, I could only sit on a "doughnut." I took this thing with me every where and, because of it, caught good natured ribbing every where I went. Because I was physically unable to stay in the cockpit for more than an hour, they assigned me ash and trash missions. One of these was being "Smoky." For the ARVN evacuation from Laos, we had been assigned a UH-1H equipped with a smoke generator and two 50 cal machine guns. They were better than the 40MM chunker except for the results that their vibration caused. Flying the smoke ship was ideal for my condition. I would fly out to Khe Sanh or Ham Nie, about a twenty minute flight, and stand-by. A smoke mission usually only took 20 to 40 minutes even for the ones 10 or 20 miles into Laos. When called, I would fly to the PZ, and orbit. When the slicks turned final, I would fall in behind one of the gunships and follow him in on his gun-run. On final into the PZ, I would slide off the gunship's track and position the smoke ship between the bad guys and the PZ. On short final the gunner and crewchief would start working out with the 50s and the copilot would activate the smoke. We would make one pass then climb up to altitude awaiting a call for a repeat performance and then go home. Smoke was a blessed mission. We never took a hit. When flying the smoke ship, I used the call sign "Smoky" with my Blue Star 77 call sign, Smoky 77, or Blue Star Smoky, or sometimes just Smoky. On one occasion I had called "Smoky on long final" when Dang Ha tower asked the question, "Why is your call sign 'Smoky?'" "Because I am a smoke ship". "What's a smoke-ship?" "We make smoke. Would like a demonstration?" "Yes!" On short final for a low pass down the runway we activated the smoke. There was a C-130 on final behind us. Apparently, he had not been listening to the radio conversation between the Dong Ha tower and us. When smoky cut loose, he screamed that a Huey had crashed and burned on the runway. He made a go-around while we had a good chuckle. As the weather warmed after the winter monsoon ended in March, sickness started spreading through the camp. The flight surgeon said that most of the disease was due to the infestation of flies. Our "Old Man" asked for suggestions. Many years prior to the Army, I had operated a jeep equipped for "fogging" insecticide for mosquito control. The unit worked by injecting a diesel fuel and insecticide mixture into the engine's exhaust. The smoke ship made smoke by injecting diesel fuel spray into the engine's exhaust. I told the "Old Man" about the similarities of operation between the jeep and the smoke ship. He said to try mixing insecticide with the fuel oil in the smoke ship and fog the compound. Couldn't hurt anything to try. Lt Larson, the supply officer, procured some powered insecticide.

However, the instructions only involved mixing it with water. Nothing was mentioned about mixing it with any type of petroleum product. It was now time to experiment. First, we mixed some of the powder with diesel fuel to make certain that the powder would dissolve and stay suspended for at least for an hour in the diesel fuel. It did. Then, we mixed a batch for "fogging the compound." The only problem was, we had no idea what was the correct ratio of insecticide to diesel fuel. The insecticide came in two pound containers. To begin with, we decided to dissolve two pounds of the insecticide with four gallons of diesel fuel. That quantity was chosen so that the mixture could be shaken up in a five gallon jerry can. That mixture was then poured into the smoke generators diesel fuel tank which was filled with diesel fuel.. The tank held about

30 gallons which was about ten minutes worth of smoke. Please don't hold me to task about the accuracy. These memories are 24 years old. Now it was time to go on the attack against the flies. I took off and circled the compound. The 48th was on the southeast side of the runway and we would be crossing it during the fogging operation. The insecticide fog might last for five to ten minutes depending on wind. I called tower and briefed him about what we were doing and the fact the runway would be blanketed with smoke/fog for five to ten minutes once we commenced the operation. We orbited just to the south awaiting clearance. I was going to start smoking the compound on a run from south to north and working west to east. The commander's of the adjacent units had all so expressed a desire for us to also smoke their areas. Once, I saw how things went over the 48th I was going to cover all of Dong Ha. Tower finally gave the OK to start smoking. I approached the compound at about 50 feet AGL and 40 knots. At the outer perimeter the copilot activated the smoke (a hand held push button switch) that turn on an electric fuel boost pump that pumped the diesel fuel mixture to a ring shaped manifold housing several injectors that. in turn, sprayed the mixture into the engine exhaust pipe. The hot engine exhaust gas heats and evaporates the diesel fuel into a white vapor cloud. There was no wind. The kill ratio for flies should be high. As we (notice the we as opposed to I) crossed the center of the compound we noticed a line of troops waving at us. On a closer look we saw that they were holding dinning trays and they were not waving, they were shaking their fist. It was supper time and they were patiently waiting in line to be served their one hot meal of the day when we, on our mission of mercy, fogged them. That evening my name was changed to "Mudd." But the flies were gone.

29 Mar -

30 Mar -

What Happened Afterwards

3 Apr - SP4 Lagenour, a door gunner for the 48th AHC, linked up with an American armored unit after walking out of Laos with some ARVN soldiers. His Huey was shot down on Mar 19 about three miles southeast of ALOUI. The following account appeared in the 4 Apr Stars and Stripes:

PHU BAI, Vietnam - Spec 4 Paul Lagenour, the helicopter goor gunner who walked out of Laos and into the position of a U.S. armored unit near Lang Vei Wednesday with a South Vietnamese soldier and a Vietnamese Marine, told Friday of brushes with North Vietnamese troops, U.S. helicopter gunships and other ARVN soldiers separated from their units during his 13-day ordeal. Lagenour, 21, said he and he companions survived by eating "rice and leaves" and carefully avoiding contact with enemy troops. Three other ARVN soldiers who started out with Lagenour when he was separated from the main ARVN airborne force were captured by the Reds as they fled from a U.S. gunship attacking a tank near their position, he said. Lagenour's chopper was downed by enemy ground fire March 19 along with three other U.S. ships on a landing zone three miles southeast of fire support base A Luoi, then being abandoned. The choppers were trying to extract the 2nd ARVN Airborne Bn., which was surrounded by enemy

troops on the LZ. The lift was aborted in the face of intense ground fire and Lagenour found himself directing U.S. air strikes around the position when a chopper came in to pick him up. He said he was not able to reach the rescue ship. Wounded in the left arm and leg by an enemy mortar shell, he continued directing air strikes with the Vietnamese major commanding the battalion. He said the officer made a great show of joviality while working with him to calm the hard-pressed troops. The units moved south Friday and Saturday fighting a running battle with North Vietnamese forces as Lagenour continued to call in U.S. gunships and jets. During a particularly hot firefight Saturday night he and four ARVN troopers were separated from the rest of the unit and started south hoping to find a friendly fire base. Lagenour said the thought that most occupied his mind during the ordeal was a cold orange soda. He had to settle for cold rice wrapped in edible leaves. "It tasted really good," he said, "sort of like a very dry martini." He said he sometimes wished he had a special girl to think about. He said he and his companions wrapped dry leaves in tissue paper to make something to smoke. After six days in the bush evading enemy units the men spotted two helicopter gunships south of Highway 9 and east of abandoned fire support base Alpha. They laid out a signal for the Cobras but darkness fell before they could be picked up, and they were forced to move to seek cover. The next day they were resting in a creek bed when rockets from a Cobra attacking an enemy tank began hitting near them. Hurrying uphill along a trail through the jungle, they ran into a group of North Vietnamese and three of the ARVN soldiers were captured. Lagenour said he and the remaining South Vietnamese infantryman continued to move southeast. The two men were joined by a Vietnamese Marine and also met other ARVN soldiers separated from their units, but did not join forces because they believed their chances for survival were better in small groups, he said. Lagenour said he believes there are still many ARVN troops wandering in Laos. Fixing their direction by the sun and avoiding roads and trails, Lagenour said, they crossed the border March 29 or 30. Tuesday morning they spotted U.S. tanks in the distance and set out to link up with the unit. After walking through what seemed like endless elephant grass, he said they came within hailing distance of the GIs. He yelled, "Hey, don't shoot, I'm an American," several times until the group waved him forward. Letting out a whoop he embraced the first GI he met, telling them, "You guys are the prettiest thing I've even seen in my life." There was no time when he thought he wouldn't make it back, he said. Time after time he praised the courage and poise of the South Vietnamese airborne unit and the men who accompanied him to safety. He credited the South Vietnamese soldier who shared the ordeal with saving his life. Before they were separated from the battalion, Lagenour said, ARVN soldiers gave up their foxholes for him and covered him with their bodies when the shelling got heavy. Lagenour has been awarded a Purple Heart and Silver Star. He was scheduled to be flown to his home of Odon, Ind., within a few days. On his return to the United States, Lagenour said, he will stay on his family's farm and "laze around and take things easy." He said he would like to be returned to his unit, the 48th Assault Helicopter Co., for the rest of his tour, about three months.

Victory Fly-by - VHPA member Ed Strazzini, who flew CH-54As for the 478th, remembers:

A few weeks after it all came to an end and Khe Sanh was again abandoned, we provided three Skyranes to participate along with three of every other Lam Son 719 aircraft, in a victory formation fly-by over the ancient city of Hue. The flight was staged out of fire base Nancy. I have copies of some 8mm movie footage taken from the ground of this event.

7 May - The 48th AHC moved to Da Nang from Dong Ha. VHPA member Cliff Whiting recalls:

Quoting from my letter #297 to my wife dated Friday, May 7, 1971, 8 p.m. "We had a company meeting just a little while ago and we are moving to Da Nang from Dong Ha 'TOMORROW' - Yes, to the air force base there - beds, sheets, hot water, officers club, and real food! We were told that we will be supporting the 196th Light Infantry Brigade." The 48th AHC moved to Da Nang the following day, May 8. No more flights into Laos! Breaking camp was a memorable experience. The CO was gone for the day and we burned the shitters to the ground. Then we used our pistols to shoot at rats that had been living under our tents. Luckily (and believe it, the 48th motto was "Skill Not Luck") no one got shot."

Glossary

"6" - The nick name given to the OH-6A helicopter which was used as a Light Observation Helicopter (LOH) also known as LOACH. Also the nick name for a unit commander.

ALPHA - Located at XD592378 in Laos, on Route 9.

ALUOI - Located at XD532392 in Laos, on Route 9, about 32 Ks west of Khe Sanh, was first occupied on 10 Feb.

AMC - Air Mission Commander. The name of the officer in charge of a specific aviation mission.

A Luoi - Located at ? in RVN and was a Special Forces camp in the early 1960s. The camp and its air strip were abandoned about 1965 but became an LZ and a landmark for almost everyone that was ever in the A Shau Valley.

BRAVO - Located at XD640380 in Laos, on Route 9.

C&C - Command and Control also Charlie Charlie. The name for the aircraft that carried the individual(s) who controlled an operation, mission, or battle. Most of the time, C&C was flown in a Huey with an extra radio console in the rear for the officers, senior NCOs, and radio operators that formed the command group.

CCN - Command and Control North. The organization under the 5th Special Forces Group that directed MACV-SOG operations in the northern areas, especially in Laos.

CE - Crew Engineer. The normal abbreviation for crew chief. Each helicopter was assigned a crew chief. This enlisted man was responsible for the maintenance and care of this aircraft. He also flew as a gunner on UH-1 aircraft.

CO - Commanding Officer

Dewey Canyon II - was the name of the American effort in 1971 to support the ARVN Lam Son 719. Operation Dewey Canyon I was the U.S. Marine drive into the Khe Sanh area in 1969.

FB - Fire Base. A piece of ground, usually high ground relative to the surrounding terrain, occupied by one or more artillery and/or mortar units. Its perimeter may be defended by an infantry unit. Infantry units may use a FB for their forward HQ and as a base for operations into the surrounding terrain. Also see FSB.

FB BROWN - Located at XD503358 in Laos,

FB DELTA - Located at XD648362 in Laos, was about 23 Ks WS of Khe Sanh, was first occupied on 10 Feb.

FB DELTA I - Located at XD552343 in Laos, was about 30 Ks WS of Khe Sanh, was first occupied on 12 Feb.

FB HOTEL - Located at XD725347(?) in Laos about ? Ks south and overlooking Route 9, was about 12 Ks WWS of Khe Sanh, was first occupied on 8 Feb.

FB HOTEL II - Located at ? in Laos, was about 24 Ks WS of Khe Sanh, was first occupied on 14 Feb, then evacuated and abandoned on 24 Feb.

FB LOLO - Located at XD432372 in Laos about 42 KM west of Khe Sahn on the escarpment overlooking the Xe Pon River, was first occupied on 3 March.

FE - Flight Engineer. The senior enlisted crew member on a Chinook or a Chain. His speciality involved working with external loads.

FSB - Fire Support Base. A relative secure area near the center of an AO for a ground unit, usually an Infantry unit, that hosted an artillery and/or mortar unit. Ideally the Infantry protected the base for attack and the Artillery supported the Infantry. Normally, one FSB could also receive protective fires from Artillery on another FSB.

HAC BAO Company - An elite infantry company from the 1st ARVN Inf Div used by Air Cavalry units for security and / or extraction of downed aircraft and crews in Laos in lieu of US Infantry in their aero-rifle platoons. Hac Bao meant "Black Cat" and which had a special and fearful meaning to the Vietnamese. The I Corp unit was based at Da Nang.

ITO - Instrument Take Off.

Khe Sanh - also Kilo Sierra. The famous old Marine Corps base that was reoccupied and became the focal point for the US aviation and logistics support as well the the center for the ARVN activities for Dewey Canyon II and Lam Son 719. Khe Sanh had the western most air strip capability of handling USAF C130 transports.

KILO - An ARVN logics and forward headquarters base located about a miles south of Khe Sanh. HMMH-463 maintained a LNO there to coordinate their heavy lifts for the ARVN.

Lam Son - was the birthplace of a famous Vietnamese patriot who defeated an invading Chinese army in 1427. The name is associated with victory and was used as part of the name in several ARVN operations. The numerical designation for 719 came by combining the year (1971) and the main highway to be used, Route 9.

Lang Vei - An area on Route 9 not far from the border with Laos. The original SF camp had been overrun prior to the famous siege of Khe Sanh in 1968. During Lam Son 719, this general area was used by the ARVN Armor as their last base prior to entering Laos. There was also a helicopter refuel and staging area here but it had no perimeter and was a spooky place to have to RON.

LNO - Liaison Officer. Usually a rated officer from an aviation unit that worked on the ground with the major commands that required aviation support. The LNO would also work with the aviation unit's Operations to pass missions and priorities on the air crews.

LZ - Landing Zone. A place where helicopters can land troops and/or supplies for a ground unit, usually an Infantry unit. An LZ might not have a resident artillery or mortar unit.

LZ 30 - Located at ? in Laos. It was about 25Ks WWN of Khe Sanh, first occupied on 8 Feb, then evacuated and abandoned on 5 Mar.

LZ 31 - Located at ? in Laos. It was about 33Ks WWN of Khe Sanh, first occupied on 8 Feb and overrun on 25 Feb.

LZ BLUE - Located at ? in Laos. It was about 18Ks WS of Khe Sanh. It was first occupied on 8 Feb.

LZ BROWN - Located at ? in Laos. It was about 35Ks WWS of Khe Sanh. It was first occupied on 23 Feb.

LZ DON - Located at ? in Laos. It was about 25Ks WS of Khe Sanh. It was first occupied on 11 Feb.

LZ GREEN - Located at ? in Laos. It was about 31Ks WS of Khe Sanh. It was first occupied on ? Feb and abandoned on 23 Feb.

LZ GRASS - Located at ? in Laos. It was about 28Ks WSS of Khe Sanh, first occupied on 15 Feb and was the southern most major LZ during the operation.

LZ RANGER NORTH - Located at ? in Laos, was about 28Ks NW of Khe Sanh, first occupied on 11 Feb and overrun on 20 Feb. It was the northern most major LZ during the operation.

LZ RANGER SOUTH- Located at ? in Laos, was about 29Ks NW of Khe Sanh, first occupied on 8 Feb, then evacuated and abandoned on 25 Feb.

LZ WHITE - Located at ? in Laos. It was about 30Ks WWS of Khe Sanh, first occupied on ? Feb and abandoned on 23 Feb.

MACV-SOG

Objective 30 - See LZ 30

Objective 31 - See LZ 31

ORLL - An Operations Report - Lessons Learned. The type of report written by Army units either quarterly or after a major operation. The VHPA has copies of several ORLLs for the AHCs, the CABs, and 101st Abn units including the 101st Abn Div's report which is approximately 400 pages long.

QL9 - Also known as National Highway 9 or Route 9. An old French road with an eastern terminus at QL1 at Dong Ha. By 1971 it was an all-weather paved highway from Dong Ha west through Cam Lo for 15 Km before swinging sharply south for 8 Kms down to FB Vandergrif. At Vandergrif it became little more than an enhanced dirt road as it turned west again reaching out to Khe Sanh and continuing on to the Laotian border. In Laos (and in western Vietnam) it was maintained by the NVA as a truck route to feed their logistic centers in the A Shau Valley.

Route 9 - See QL9.

SOG - Studied and Observation Group. The cover name for secret teams that performed deep penetration missions of strategic reconnaissance and interdiction which were called, depending on the time frame, "Shining Brass" or "Prairie Fire" missions.

VR - Visual reconnaissance. An aviation mission, usually flown by a OH-6A or OH-58 helicopter, requiring low level, low speed flight over terrain not currently occupied by a friendly force. The object is to determine the current status of enemy activities in the area.

Helicopter units involved in Lam Son 719

1st Bde (Avn Det), 5th Inf (Mech) / 4 UH-1H, 6 OH-58

1st Bde (Avn Det), 101st ABN

2d Bde (Avn Det), 101st ABN

3rd Bde (Avn Det), 101st ABN

48th Avn Co (AHC) OPCONed to 223d CAB / 23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C / Ninh Hoa / Dong Ha/ Da Nang

71st Avn Co (AHC) OPCONed to 14th CAB / 23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C

116th Avn Co (AHC) served 5 - 7 and 22 - 24 Mar OPCONed to 14th CAB / 23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C / Quang Tri. Only part of the company participated. Assets from the 176th AHC joined with the 116th during these two "reinforcing" efforts.

132d Avn Co (ASHC) OPCONed to 159th ASHB, 101st ABN / 16 CH-47

163d Avn Co (GS) , 101st ABN / 10 UH-1H, 12 OH-6A

173d Avn Co (AHC) OPCONed to 223d CAB / 23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C

174th Avn Co (AHC) OPCONed to 14th CAB / 23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C

176th Avn Co (AHC) served 5 - 7 and 22 - 24 Mar OPCONed to 14th CAB / 23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C / Quang Tri. Only part of the company participated. Assets from the 176th AHC joined with the 116th during these two "reinforcing" efforts.

179th Avn Co (ASHC) OPCONed to 159th ASHB, 101st ABN / 16 CH-47

235th Avn Co (AWC) OPCONed to 101st AHB / 21 AH-1G, 3 UH-1H

237th Med Det/Phu Bai and Quang Tri/Khe Sanh

238th Avn Co (AWC) OPCONed to 223d CAB / 12 UH-1C, 1 UH-1H

282d Avn Co (AHC) served 5 - 7 and 22 - 24 Mar OPCONed to 223d CAB / 23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C

326th Med Bn

478th Avn Co (HH) attached to 159th ASHB, 101st ABN / 10 CH-54A / operated out of their permanent base camp at Red Beach, Da Nang but stages two or three aircraft at Phu Bai each night. Standing commitment was 5 aircraft per day

498th Med Co (Air Ambulance) based out of An Son in II Corps maintained a two ship detachment at Khe Sanh at least during part of February and March.

571st Med Det Khe Sanh

A/101st AHB, 101st ABN / 20 UH-1H

A/158th AHB, 101st ABN / 20 UH-1H

A/159th ASHB, 101st ABN / 16 CH-47

A/2/17 Cav, 101st ABN / 8 UH-1H, 9 AH-1G, 10 OH-6A

A/4/77 ARA, 101st ABN / 12 AH-1G

B/101st AHB, 101st ABN / 20 UH-1H

B/158th AHB, 101st ABN / 20 UH-1H

B/159th ASHB, 101st ABN / 16 CH-47

B/2/17 Cav, 101st ABN / 8 UH-1H, 9 AH-1G, 10 OH-6A

B/4/77 ARA, 101st ABN / 12 AH-1G

B/2/20 ARA, 1st Cav Div/ 12 AH-1G

B/7/1 Cav attached to 223d CAB, OPCONed to 2/17 Cav, 101st ABN / 8 UH-1H, 9 AH-1G, 10 OH-6A

C/101st AHB, 101st ABN / 20 UH-1H

C/158th AHB, 101st ABN / 20 UH-1H

C/159th ASHB, 101st ABN / 16 CH-47

C/2/17 Cav, 101st ABN / 8 UH-1H, 9 AH-1G, 10 OH-6A

C/4/77 ARA, 101st ABN / 12 AH-1G

C/7/17 Cav attached to 223d CAB, OPCONed to 2/17 Cav, 101st ABN / 8 UH-1H, 9 AH-1G, 10 OH-6A / An Son / Quang Tri / An Son

D/101st AHB, 101st ABN / 12 AH-1G

D/158th AHB, 101st ABN / 12 AH-1G

D/227th AHB OPCONed to 158th AHB / 12 AH-1G

E/1/9th Cav, 1st Cav Div / 8 UH-1H, 9 AH-1G, 10 OH-6A

HHB/4/77 ARA, 101st ABN

HHC 14th CAB OPCONed to 101st CAG

HHC 101st AHB, 101st ABN

HHC 101st CAG, 101st ABN

HHC 158th AHB, 101st ABN

HHC 159th ASHB, 101st ABN

HHC 223d CAB OPCONed to 101st CAG

HHT/2/17 Cav, 101st ABN / 8 UN-1H

HMH-463 OPCONed on a mission basis to 159th ASHB, 101st ABN / 16 CH-53 / operated out of their permanent base camp at Marble Mountain Airbase, Da Nang.

HML-367 sent USMC AH-1Gs to escort the CH-53s.