

KIA 18 May 70

WO1 Robert K Cole Sgt Carlton C Gray WO1 Nicholas G Saunders

On May 18, 1970 Warrant Officer Robert K. Cole, Warrant Officer Nicholas G. Saunders, and SGT. Carlton C. Gray were killed. They were flying a re-supply mission in the Ripcord area and had made a radio transmission to an infantry unit after dropping supplies. They had a pay officer and his sergeant with them. Easterling, the crew-chief jumped from the aircraft prior to impact and was found on an adjacent ridge several days later. Easterling stated that after the crash the crew was out of the aircraft when he walked down to get his weapon. Easterling believed that the rest of the crew was captured briefly and then placed in the aircraft and burned later that day. The pay officer was found with a broken neck. Search was conducted for several days with no contact.

The bodies of Cole, Saunders, and Gray were sling loaded back to Camp Evans. During the flight Cole's body bag opened and his body dropped to the earth. It was later recovered. Cole' father made it to Viet Nam to do his own investigation. Colonel (then Major) Gerald Lord had corresponded with Mrs. Saunders, Nick's mother, several times. When he was stationed at the Pentagon, he met with Mrs. Saunders.

From "History of Company"
Gary Earls beegee@abraxis.com

From: "Joseph Haymore" <jhaymore@alltel.net>
Subject: **Re: Saunders Cole Gray**
Send reply to: phoenix50@alltel.net
Date sent: Thu, 25 May 2000 17:16:39 -0500

I was in the operations when we got the radio call that Easterling had been picked up. He was, I believe, an Sp5. He said that he had jumped out of the aircraft while it was crashing. He said that he had been hiding in a shell crater and drinking rain water that had collected in the crater for 3 days. I was told that the tail boom looked as if it had been used as a target by some gooks after the aircraft was on the ground. If this proves to differ from what others remember I beg that you bear in mind that my memory of that period is still sketchy at best.

Joseph Haymore~3M

From: Ken Mayberry <kensue@neb.rr.com>
To: Phamus Phoenix Pilots <Phoenix50@Double.Duece.No.Slack>
Sent: Tuesday, May 23, 2000 11:42 AM
Subject: Saunders Cole Gray

Here is what I remember about Nick the Slick. He was resupplying the Ripcord area when he came up missing, his last transmission was to an infantry group after dropping supplies off. We searched for many days with no contact. Probably a week later (? don't recall # of days) a huey passing a ridge spotted & rescued the crewchief, CE-Easterling. From him they located the wreck. Easterling told us they were low to the terrain & were taking fire when shot down. The CE either jumped or was thrown out. The bodies were lifted out in body bags slung by ropes. During transport one of the bags came open & the body was lost but later recovered. I think it was Cole. I do believe I read in the Ripcord Report that the troops near Ripcord had been ordered to search for the body & they found it.

Ken Mayberry

From: Larry G. Frazier <frazierlg@ctos.com>
To: Gary and Becky Earls <beegee@abraxis.com>
Sent: Monday, May 22, 2000 11:25 PM
Subject: Re: Saunders,Cole, and Gray

Gary,

You'll probably have your hand full on this one. I visited with Mrs. Sara Saunders several times on her son. His data has been screwed up quite a bit. She claims he couldn't of been in "C" company, because he was always first in everything and was in "A:" company. She seriously told me this. He is also listed in places as a cobra pilot and didn't belong to our company. I still think he was Phoenix all the way. They have an LZ at Campbell named after him, or did a few years ago. I'll check it out when we go to Campbell in early June. Now for the part I can help with - Carlton Gray (not Carl) was a pretty steady gunner on 611 (2nd Platoon) with me. He was a good friend, and we spent quite a bit of time drinking together. We had a few the night before he was lost, and both of us planned on celebrating our birthdays together. I think his was May 19th or 20th, and mine is May 30th. They were lost I believe out by Ripcord (before the buildup), and the crewchief walked around for several days before he was found sitting on a tree stump. He talked about a waterfall quite a bit. The crewchiefs name was Easterling, I've also got a picture of him. He went home after he was recovered, I think he had head injuries or at the least had battle fatigue pretty bad.

Let me know if you need anything else. Thanks for asking.

Larry G. Frazier
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