

History of Company "C", 158th Aviation Battalion

" Phoenix"

Introduction

Each military unit has its own unique history and "Charlie" Company is no different. There was an attitude of " I'll come get you today out of that hot Landing Zone because tomorrow you may have to make the same decision to get me out". The Phoenix suffered more casualties in a two-year period than any other aviation unit in Viet Nam. ¹²⁹ They served in an area of South Viet Nam in which all types of terrain and enemy forces were encountered. Fifty percent of all US casualties during the Vietnam War were suffered in I Corps. ¹⁰¹ The men who served with this unit are proud of their contribution to the Viet Nam War and Army Aviation. Sometimes the best reward for heroism was the smile on the face of the man who had been snatched from the jaws of death.

During their service with the 101st, the Phoenix were involved with three major battles- Hamburger Hill, Firebase Ripcord, and Lam Son 719. There were other battles but not as notable as those three battles.

"The aviation units were the sole combat element of the U.S. Army that did not come apart under the stress of the war in Vietnam. Nearly 6,000 helicopter pilots and crewmember perished, but the Army airmen never cracked. Whether it was the oneness of men and acrobatic flying machine, whether it was the equally shared risk of officer pilot and enlisted crewmember, whatever the reason, the men of the helicopters kept their discipline and their spirit. As the French parachutists became the paladins of that earlier war, so the U.S. Army aviators became the dark knights of the one. " ⁶⁶

1. Unit History

In March 1968, Warrant Officer John Eaton was assigned to the 297th Aviation Company at Fort Riley, Kansas. There was one problem. There wasn't any 297th Aviation Company so he was assigned to the 16th Aviation Battalion. The 16th consisted of a battalion headquarters and a headquarters company. Captain Monte Davis was the headquarters company commander and Major John Jenkins was the executive officer of the 16th and LTC Norman Miller was the commander of the 16th. The mission of the 16th was to train and prepare aviation units for deployment to South East Asia. Earlier the 16th had trained and deployed a unit to Thailand. Al Gillis had the distinction of being the first person to sign the 297th duty roster at Fort Riley with Bob Marrs as the second man a day later. Captain Monty Davis and First Lieutenant Dave Rainey were the first commissioned officers to be assigned to the 297th. ⁴⁸ The 297th Aviation Company would become Company "C" of the 158th Aviation Battalion on August 6, 1968. Major Jenkins who had served with the 1st Cavalry Division in Viet Nam became its first company commander with Captain Monte Davis as the executive officer; Warrant Officer John Eaton and a SSG Tindle were among the first unit members. 1 Warrant Officer John Mills was assigned to

the 297th and became the motor officer. ³⁷ Many of the warrant officer pilots who were next assigned to what was to become C/158th started at Fort Wolters as class 68-1 in June, 1967 and then to Fort Rucker where they became class 68-503. Those aviators assigned from Fort Rucker were Jack Ross, Roy "Twiggy" Miller, Raymond O. "Tex" Mobley, John Hodnett, Maurice Morton, Robert Coleman, Richard Paetz, Jerry Powell, Gary Quarles, Bob Brooks, Otto Offereins, Larry Pluhar, Leon Dixon, Phillip Nystrom, Rick Morrow, Jamie Naverette, Wayne Moline, Jerry Warnick, Terry Mortenson, Wallace A. "Doc" Pryor (killed in an automobile accident at Fort Riley when his car hit a stopped city bus), Ron Nyhan, Ken Montgomery, and James Wilkinson (he is the one who came up with the call sign, Phoenix). ²² The 273rd Transportation Corps (TC) detachment was assigned for additional maintenance support. Bob Clark remembers that his military occupation specialty was Heavy Equipment Repair Parts Specialist and it was changed to Aircraft Repair Parts Specialist when he got to Fort Riley. One of the unit members was a machinist from North Carolina that could make anything out of sheet metal. Later in Viet Nam the two supply sections were combined with Bob Clark in charge of the day shift and a Specialist 5 Campbell in charge of the night shift. ⁴⁹

As Skip Lee recalls the 297th Assault Helicopter Company consisted of one gun ship platoon and two lift platoons. Before the company got its initial issue of aircraft, the pilots were given "currency" rides in an old CH-34 flown by an old Chief Warrant Officer 4 (possibility named Jacobson) at Marshall Army Airfield. The CW4 also took several pilots on a test flight of a CH37 Mojave. ⁵⁰ The unit picked up about a half dozen "B" models from the Red River Army Depot, right on Marshall field at Riley shortly after being formed. When Skip's group reported to Riley there were already a few pilots assigned. One was a big prick of a training officer named John Eaton. He is the one that thought it was necessary to go to the gas chamber, fire our pistols, and all that other Army crap. Later they would go to the Bell Helicopter plant and pick up the aircraft that they were going to take to Viet Nam. The Company Commander was Major John Jenkins and then the Executive Officer (XO) was Captain Robert B. Dalton. The First Platoon Leader was Major Fred Daniloff and the Second Platoon Leader was Major Paul F. Burke. CPT Monte Davis became a section leader and the supply officer and Major William Ankenbrandt was the maintenance officer. Within the next couple of weeks after we arrived others started showing up. They were CPT Larry Willett, LT. Gary Elliott, LT. Greg Fuchs, LT Dave Rainey, Warrant Officers (WO) Frank Metsker, Donnell Mills, Albert Ondira (the piano player), CW2 Jones (maintenance officer) and several others. ²²

The rest of the 158th Aviation Battalion was formed at Fort Carson, Colorado. Companies "A" and "B" were assault helicopter companies and "D" was the attack helicopter company and a Headquarters Company. The 158th Aviation Battalion was activated on 25 July 1968 with Major Maurice Dougherty as the commander. The mission of the newly formed units was to train the individual aviators, crews, and supporting personnel in airmobile operations on a section, platoon, and company, and coordinated battalion level. LTC Peter C. Withers would become the 158th Battalion Commander. Also at Fort Riley, the 273rd Transportation Detachment was activated under the command of Major William Ankenbrandt. The mission of the 273rd was to perform direct support

maintenance, avionics, and supply support for Company "C", 158th Aviation Battalion (AH).⁴²

Being at Fort Riley had some advantages for the unit. The Post and Headquarters staff went all out to help Company "C". There were a large number of training areas available. Also the unit members who had a previous tour in Viet Nam were invaluable in passing on their experiences and training to accomplish combat missions. They spent a lot of time training in the field and even though there weren't any mountains at Fort Riley, the weather was as Major Jenkins wrote, "hot, hot, hot". There were always problems with density altitude, which became good training for Viet Nam.² SFC Bob Boyer remembers that they did a lot of field training and setting up an airfield.³⁵ George C. Garich remembers the Thursday night cross country flights that included a stop for a steak meal.⁴⁵ Monty Davis remembers a couple of Lieutenants that got in trouble for throwing eggs on the car that belonged to the Mayor of Junction City.⁴⁶

Skip Lee remembers training a little differently. He stated that you went to Operations, picked up a credit card, filing a flight plan and going to places like Kansas City or St. Joseph, Missouri. "Some of the more adventurous even got down to Tulsa or Wichita. They would also fly to one of the many deserted WWII training fields and pick up some of the sweet young girls from Kansas State University, and take them along. A couple of guys even had the nerve to put their wives or girlfriends in flight suits and leave from the airfield. We actually did some unit training, like the time we over flew a turkey farm with a flight of ten helicopters and scared all the turkeys so bad they beat themselves to death. The farmer filed a claim with the government and was paid a pretty penny and we got told to quit flying over turkey farms.²² Bob Marrs remembers that Lt. Dave Rainey was the flight leader on the practice formation flight over the Fort Riley area that killed the turkeys. Supposedly five hundred turkeys were killed even though no one knew it until they landed back at Marshall Army Airfield.⁵⁰ We also had the honor of flying in a fly-by for the last surviving horse from the horse cavalry, "Chief". The old fellow went to the happy hunting grounds that summer so there was quite a funeral. We also flew the game warden around so they could count their buffalo herds. We actually did go on one field problem, I believe in November because it was pretty cold. The memorable part of that training exercise is when Major Jenkins found out that several pilots brought along some spirits to ward off the cold weather (Major Daniloff set the precedent here when he told us that he was not going to freeze out in the Riley boondocks). He ordered a late night scramble and everyone was ready to go, even though some were unable to find their assigned aircraft. Fortunately, he called it off before anybody could get the aircraft started. We all got a very stern lecture and then proceeded to dig a big hole and bury the remaining booze. So, if you are ever out somewhere in the vast expanses of Riley you may find a cache of some pretty good whiskey that has been aged for an additional 34 years. "²²

Gary Elliott remembered that a wind storm was coming to Fort Riley and they needed to put every aircraft in the hanger to protect them. It wasn't an easy task since several unit members had been drinking at the officer's club but they accomplished their mission without putting a scratch on any aircraft. 122

The company also was on alert for the passing of "Chief", the last registered cavalry horse in the US Army. Everyone was required to keep one set of every type of their uniforms including their dress greens and dress blues in their car. They also received training for riot control in the event that they were needed in Baltimore. ¹³⁵

The pilots of the "Phoenix" also re-established the "Cockpit Club" at the airfield. In the early 1960s there was a "Cockpit Club" at the airfield since the regular Officer's Club allowed duty uniform to be worn at the "O" club but not flight suits. In 1961-1962, the 18th Aviation Company and the 339th Transportation Company created the "Cockpit Club" as their Officer's club. The club was closed when the two units deployed to Viet Nam in 1962. ²³ The Phoenix pilots re-established the "Cockpit Club". Skip Lee stated that the operating hours were from when you got off work until no one was left standing. There were a couple of great piano players in the unit, Wayne Moline and Albert Ondira. One time an Air Force Colonel came into the club and walked over to Skip Lee, pulled down the zipper of Skip's flight suit and poured a beer down on Skip's chest. Skip put the Colonel in a headlock, drug him to the bar, and poured a whole pitcher down the colonel's back. The colonel bought Skip a beer and they continued their lively discussion.

While on a low level training flight on August 9, 1968, WO Keith A. Reider and WO Glendon T. Rowan and crew chief, Specialist 4 Alfred C. Murphy were killed in an aircraft crash (UH-1B) near the intersection of Kansas 82 and Highway 77 while on the low level course. ¹⁰⁶ Fortunately, they crashed in an unpopulated area west of main post. Bob Marrs and Phil Nystrum were flying a chase aircraft for General William Westmoreland, the Army Chief of Staff on an inspection flight over Fort Riley. They were directed to drop General Westmoreland at a location and pick up a medical team and fly to the crash site. They arrived about forty-five minutes after the impact. A unit of the 24th Infantry Division witnessed the accident. ⁵⁹ Bob Marrs stated that rotor head was found intact after the crash. Greg Moody's aircraft was carrying Military Police for the Westmoreland inspection. He was instructed to take the Military Police to the crash site so they could secure the site. It looked to Greg that Reider's aircraft must have had a transmission lockup since everything had crashed in one place as if it had crashed straight down. ⁶⁰

Jack Ross saw the accident investigation board's report on the crash and the board determined that it was "target fixation" while practicing gun runs. ¹³³ Chuck Eckenroth was asked by CPT. Davis to escort the body of Alfred Murphy to his home in Texas.

A memorial service was held for Reider, Rowan, Murphy and Wallace A. "Doc" Pryor who died in a car crash. Pryor had left the Officer's Club and a short time later ran into the back of a bus. He was driving his black MGB. Greg Moody arrived at the accident site about ten minutes after it happened. Greg notified Doc's roommates and Doc's fiancé. ¹¹⁹

On December 1, 1968, Fort Riley Headquarters published the movement orders for Charlie Company to move to the Republic of South Viet Nam with a reporting date of January 31, 1969. Their authorized strength was ten officers, thirty-five warrant officers and eighty enlisted men. ⁴⁰

When it became time for the Phoenix to deploy to the Republic of Viet Nam, they flew their aircraft to California for departure. It took two trips to deliver the aircraft to Sharpe

Army Depot. They went by the way of Albuquerque, New Mexico. They also took the opportunity to practice low-level flight on the way.⁵⁸ Gary Elliott recalls that while he was leading a flight of five aircraft about an hour east of Albuquerque, Ken Montgomery radioed that he was doing a 180-degree turn to check on a coyote that Ken had hit with the skids of his aircraft.⁶⁷ The aircraft were then prepared for ocean travel and then transported to Oakland Naval Yard for transport to the port of DaNang, South Viet Nam. Bob Clark from the 273rd and a Warrant Officer from Austin, Texas volunteered to accompany the unit's other equipment from the port in Beaumont, Texas to the port of DaNang, Republic of Viet Nam. The unit's equipment was loaded onto a freight train at Fort Riley to Beaumont, Texas. Since they had to wait a week for the ship, the Warrant Officer and Bob Clark went to the officer's home in Austin, Texas to wait for the freighter. The freighter was from the Lykes Lines and took 27 days to get to DaNang.⁴⁹ The unit members took buses from Riley and flew out of Forbes AFB in Topeka, Kansas with refueling stops in Anchorage, Alaska; Yakota Air Force Base, Japan, and then to Da Nang Viet Nam and arrived February 23, 1969. Major Fred Daniloff, CWO Jones and Skip Lee were designated as the rear detachment. This meant that as soon as the rest of the unit got out of town, they were to make a final inspection and turn the keys to the buildings over to someone from Riley and then get to Forbes and catch the last airplane. The big brass at Riley thought it would be a brilliant idea to send us off with a parade of some sort. The only problem was that it was about 20 below zero with a wind chill of somewhere near 50 below the morning they were leaving. They had shipped their winter clothes and anything they didn't need in Vietnam so all they had to wear were jungle fatigues and lightweight flight jackets. The brass showed up in winter weight greens and overcoats to stand on the reviewing platform to send them off. They had the band in the hanger with the door closed. When it was time for them to play, they opened the doors; they played their songs, and then closed the doors before their horns froze to their lips. The Commanding General gave them a very long speech. Finally, everybody filed onto the waiting Greyhound buses. The first bus was for the officers, followed by the enlisted guys in the following two buses. Daniloff, Jones and Lee, along with a few of the wives that stayed to the last minute to see their husbands off, were standing off to the side, also freezing, as the buses passed in review. As they went by, with the general and his staff standing at rigid attention, saluting, and the band playing some patriotic song, someone (Skip was told that it was Jerry Warnick) gave the crowd a perfect "pressed ham" on the bus window. Daniloff and Lee almost had to be carried off the field we were laughing so much.

The flight for the advance party took thirty-five hours on a US Air Force C-141, Starlifter. The advance party left Fort Riley and then joined the battalion advance party at Fort Carson. When the advance party got to DaNang, they had to wait six hours for the Chinooks to take them and their equipment to Camp Evans. The Chinooks landed them at Evans in the dark and they had to unload everything then because the Chinooks couldn't stay at Camp Evans.³⁵ Skip doesn't remember how many hours the flight took for the main unit but sitting facing the rear on a C141 is not his idea of first class travel. Fortunately Major Daniloff made sure that they had enough rum to mix with the Air Force cokes to make the time go faster. Chief Jones only lasted about a month at Evans before he started shooting his .38 caliber pistol off in the middle of the night, trying to kill snakes

that were after him. The first flights got to Da Nang in the morning and the last plane got there in the same afternoon. Chinooks (CH47) picked us up for the flight to Camp Evans.²² Charlie Company shipped sixty Conexs (large metal containers) and thirty-three vehicles to Viet Nam.³⁵

The Phoenix aircraft were loaded on a Merchant Marine aircraft carrier with the rest of the battalion's aircraft. Jack Ross had to bunk with a Specialist 6th class enlisted man who was assigned to the carrier. The concept was to off load the aircraft at Cam Ranh Bay and then fly them to DaNang. Then have the unit pilots fly them to the Phoenix Nest. The aircraft couldn't be off loaded at Cam Ranh Bay so the ship continued on to DaNang. The aircraft were off loaded at DaNang. Jack didn't have any tools so the Specialist 6 hand receipted his tools to Jack so he could prepare the aircraft for flight. By hand receipting the tools, the specialist could go to his unit and get a replacement set of tools. With the tools Jack was able to install the main rotor blades and the tail rotor blades. When he was done with the tools, Jack offered the tools to the other companies if they hand receipted the tools.¹³³

The 158th was to become the second assault helicopter battalion of the 160th Aviation Group (later designated as the 101st Aviation Group) of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). The 101st was being changed from an airborne division to an airmobile division like the First Cavalry Division. The 158th Battalion was assigned to Camp Evans, which had been previously a base camp for the United States Marine Corps Third Division and later the headquarters, 1st Cavalry Division. Camp Evans was named for Lance Corporal Paul Olynn Evans who was killed in December 1966 in Quang Tri Province.⁸² SFC Boyer remembers that he was a part of the advance party and that the Seabees had to rebuild a lot of the company area which had been destroyed during a rocket attack and that they built the officer's area, hanger, and the revetments. The Battalion staff and the commanders picked the different unit locations. Dave Rainey remembers that there was a fair amount of housekeeping to do; enhancing the protection of the hootches, filling sandbags, etc. Not long after the battalion arrived, they were given a section of the perimeter to man and defend. The battalion commander (Peter C. Withers) objected vehemently but was not able to unload the task. Rainey was selected as the Secort Security Officer for the unit and had to setup the defenses in front of the bunkers in the perimeter wire; they did barbed wire, trip flares, claymores, and fugas; improve the defensive bunkers; establish fields of fire, etc. anything that would keep the enemy from getting into their sector.¹³⁸ Skip Lee remembers that everyone filled sand bags to protect hootches (living quarters) and other structures. Bob White, one of the original members built a rocking chair out of ammo crates.⁸⁵

On March 1, 1969 the battalion for the first time was assembled in its entirety to be welcomed by Major General Melvin Zais, the Commanding General of the 101st Airborne Division.⁴² Shortly after their "Welcome to the 101st" formation, which was held on the runway at Camp Evans, several rockets, hit over by the Post Exchange. The North Vietnamese Army had welcomed the 158th to Viet Nam.³ Fortunately there weren't any

injuries. The Phoenix officer quarters were on a hilltop next to 18th Medical Evacuation Hospital. Across the street were the officer quarters for Company "D", Redskins. The Redskins and the Phoenix shared an "Officer's Club in 1969 and 1970. Because they shared an officer's club, the pilots of the two companies developed a close working relationship. Occasionally they would exchange rides in each other's aircraft so there was a better understanding of each unit's roles. The Eighteen Evac moved to Quang Tri on December 1, 1969 and someone at higher headquarters decided to move an eight-inch howitzer artillery battery in 18th old location. Occasionally the artillery battery would fire harassing and interdiction fire at night, which meant you, weren't going to get any sleep. The enlisted area was down the hill to the southeast of the officer area near the Company "A" area. Company headquarters was in the same area as the enlisted quarters. "A" and "C" Companies shared a mess hall.

As Jack Ross and his maintenance crew prepared the unit's aircraft for service, several of the unit's pilots were assigned to Company "B" and Company "C" of the 101st Aviation Battalion to learn the area of operations. Some of those who went were Roy Miller, John Hodnett, Frank Metsker, Ron Nyhan, and Otto Offereins. They spent two weeks with the Kingsmen (B/101) and the Black Widows (C/101) during the February and March 1969. They became the first aircraft commanders in the unit. As Roy "Twiggy" Miller stated, "They became the blind, leading the blind." Boyer states that he went to LZ Sally for two weeks with Charlie Company, 101st Aviation Battalion for orientation on local operations. ³⁵ The 158th Battalion was declared fully operational on April 1, 1969. ⁴²

The Phoenix suffered its first casualty in Viet Nam on February 20, 1969 when Specialist 5 Andrew Mills was killed when his military vehicle overturned while returning to Camp Evans. Mills was 29 years old and was a member of the 273rd TC Detachment.

The Phoenix suffered their first aviation fatalities on the morning of April 15, 1969 with the crash of aircraft 67-17614. Warrant Officers Terry Mortensen and Jerome Warnick and Specialist 5 Doyle Dunbar were flying an early morning "sniffer" mission when they hit a large tree and exploded. ⁵ Boyer stated that it was a 37 mm cannon that killed the crew. "Sniffer" missions required that you fly at tree top level and at a speed of forty knots. At that speed and altitude you became a very good target for the other side.

Lt. David Rainey (Phoenix 26) was the first Phoenix to be decorated for landing his aircraft in a landing zone Blitz, which had been wired with trip wires attached to explosives. The first aircraft to land had been destroyed. After locating a safe place to land, Rainey landed his aircraft to rescue wounded soldiers. After the casualties were loaded Rainey flew his aircraft to the nearest medical facility. Rainey was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.. ^{50 138}

On May 2, 1969, John Mills and his crew survived a mid-air accident with a United States Marine Corps CH-46D. ³⁷ The CH-46 was climbing up to altitude when it came in contact with Mill's aircraft (67-7596) during a 3rd Marine Recon team insertion in Quang Tri Province. There was a semicircular piece of blade missing 5' in board from the tip of the rotor blade maybe 18 inches across with the leading edge intact but slightly bent.

Outboard of that point the honeycomb was intact. Looked like a shark bite of the blade. Additionally the mast was bent. The accident occurred a few miles west of the Rock Pile which was a landing zone next to a large rocky hill, over a rocky valley. There were low clouds in the area, which prevented inserting the six Marines on board. There were two Phoenix aircraft and two Marine Huey gunships from VMO6 conducting the insertion. There weren't any windows above the pilot's position on the CH-46, which prevented the pilots from seeing Mill's aircraft. About fifty feet above the ground, Mill's aircraft spun 360 degrees and he was able to chop the throttle and split the skids on landing but everyone on board survived. Two of the Marines had blade fragments in their legs. The CH-46 went inverted and crashed about ¼ mile west of Mill's landing area. ⁹⁰ Unfortunately the crew of the CH-46 was killed. ⁴ John Mills was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for saving his crew. ⁹⁰ Because the frame of the aircraft was twisted, it was sent back to United States for repair or destruction. ⁹¹

In June, 1969 some of the original unit members, such as Bob Marrs, Al Gillis, Larry Pluhar Norman Miller; and Bob Coleman, transferred from the Phoenix to other aviation units in the Mekong delta with a stop in between flying for Special Operations. This action was done so that you wouldn't have all of the experienced aviators leaving at one time. It made for a continuity of experience in the unit. CPT. Greg Fuchs was transferred to Company "A", 101st Aviation Battalion and unfortunately on June 4th, 1969 was killed when a fragmentation grenade exploded while his aircraft was in flight. Fuchs had recently made aircraft commander. The US Army Aviation Safety Board investigated this accident and it was determined that the hand grenade was mishandled by the door gunner based on the details on the door gunners protective chicken plate. ⁵¹

On May 8, 1969, the Phoenix became a part of the assault on Dong Ap Bia, also known as "Hamburger Hill" in the Ashau Valley. The A Shau was a pipeline and staging area for the North Vietnamese Army. The A Shau Valley and the four northwestern most provinces in South Vietnam were the home to the bloodiest of battles in the Vietnam War. ¹³⁷ The mountain was called Ap Bia by the local Montagard tribesman and it meant, "the mountain of the crouching beast". ⁷⁹ The assault into the Ashau Valley was a part of "Operation Apache Snow. This operation was to be a direct challenge to the North Vietnamese Army. The Ashau Valley was a stronghold for the North Vietnamese Army's 29th Infantry Regiment and had been used as a base for launching the Tet attack against the city of Hue in 1968. Pickup zone activities near Firebase Blaze, YD 539023 caused the only difficulties. Blaze was five hundred meters by a thousand meters and was twenty kilometers south of Ap Bia Mountain. ⁷⁸ The pathfinder personnel were confused by the near simultaneous arrival of the Phoenix aircraft and the aircraft from a unit of the 101st Aviation Battalion. The pathfinder personnel misdirected the Phoenix aircraft and the aircraft returned later to the same pickup zone using more fuel than was planned. Also five of the Phoenix aircraft were separated from the main body by a river that ran through the pickup zone. The infantry troops had to wade across the river to load into the aircraft. ⁵⁴ The Phoenix was the first to land in LZ 3 with the initial insertion. They carried soldiers of the 1st ARVN Division. The Army of South Vietnam unit was 2/3 ARVN. ⁸³ Major Jenkins lead the first flight in with Roy Miller as the leader of the second flight. It was a "two shipper"-landing zone which meant that it was large enough for two aircraft to land at

the same time. Later "B" Company received enemy fire in that landing zone. The Phoenix's first hot LZ was an ARVN insertion on Tiger Mountain. Roy Miller's aircraft was shot up and he had to land in the A Chau Valley floor on the third trip into the landing zone. His co-pilot was Paul Michal who was a prior Navy vet and was one of the "old" men of the Second platoon at the ripe age of 28. He was wounded and Major Jenkins landed with them and took Paul to Camp Eagle for medical treatment. Roy's crew chief, Duncan, got in the right seat and they flew aircraft 67-17616 back to the Phoenix Nest. They had taken four rounds in the fuel cell but it self-sealed at about 250 pounds of fuel. A couple of rounds came through the crewchief's well. There were several hits through the console and the right side door. One of the rounds had hit Paul. He lost part of his left hand and was sent home. Terry Hilt was the door gunner on 616 and got the first confirmed kill in the unit. UH-1, 616 had a red Chinese hat on the fuselage behind the door to signify the event. Roy got some sheet metal fragments in his right leg but didn't realize it until that night in the Phoenix club. He poured some whiskey on the wound, took two aspirin and flew the next morning. Also during the assault, Specialist Stuart Brittman, the crewchief for 67-17597 was wounded. The 101st Division withdrew from "Hamburger Hill" on May 20th but would return several times to the hill during the summer of 1969 to challenge the North Vietnamese Army. ⁴

The Phoenix lost one aircraft at Hamburger Hill. It had a short shaft failure and was being evacuated by a Chinook (CH-47). Unfortunately the Chinook crew dragged the aircraft through the trees resulting in more damage. ²⁶

Bob Coleman remembers that after the Hamburger Hill assault, his aircraft had a low side governor failure near Khe Sanh. His aircraft had the fuel cell replaced after Hamburger Hill because of the small arms hit during the insertion. He lined up to land on a goat trail because of the fear that the Khe Sanh airfield had been booby trapped. Twiggy Miller had the same problem the next day and landed in the flat lands and mowed a swarth of Nippa-Palm trees with no damage to the aircraft or crew. ¹¹¹

On July 20, 1969, tragedy would strike the maintenance platoon when SFC James Couch walked into a rotor blade while he was assisting in an aircraft recovery. Couch was walking down a slope of a hill to get on another aircraft that would return to the Phoenix's Nest. (VHPA Directory lists aircraft # 68-15248) Despite the efforts of the crew chief to warn Couch to bend down, Couch didn't see the crew chief or was distracted by something else. He walked into the main rotor blade. He was immediately taken back to Camp Evans Medical and then was transported to the Navy hospital ship (USS Repose or USS Sanctuary) off the South Vietnamese coast where he died. The sad thing was that Pappy had been at one time in his military career a member of the Presidential Flight Detachment for President Lyndon Johnson. He was well respected by everyone in the company. ³⁵

Sometimes to relieve the pressure of combat, the pilots would fly their aircraft at tree top level or come up behind a bus full of Vietnamese civilians traveling down QL1, the main highway that ran the length of South Vietnam. ⁴ These types of flight weren't condoned by the command but were used as a stress reliever by the crews. One flight of five aircraft flew under a bridge, which got the attention of the 158th Battalion Commander who put a stop to those types of antics.

On September 3, 1969, Warrant Officer Alan C. Maness was accidentally killed while performing duties as the night duty officer. He was checking the bunker guards on the perimeter. He had checked one bunker and left to go to the next bunker. The story was that he forgot something or had lost something, possibly his watch and returned to the previous bunker to search for the missing item. He surprised the soldiers at the bunker and one of the soldiers accidentally shot WO Maness. Soldiers of the Phoenix were manning the second bunker line and were upset at what had happened to Mr. Maness. They wanted to fire on the bunker where Mr. Maness was killed. Fortunately there weren't any further action taken by the Phoenix guards. It could never be determined if the soldiers at that bunker were on drugs or whether he startled them and it was an accident. ⁴ Maness was respected by his fellow unit members.

Occasionally the Phoenix had to battle the elements. Because we were close to the South China Sea we would deal with Typhoons. Such was the case with Typhoon Doris on September 6, 1969 there was a Phoenix aircraft stranded at Firebase Rendezvous and at Red Beach just north of DaNang.

Because the pilots of "D" Company lived across the street for the pilots of "C" Company and we shared our club with them, there was a special relationship between the Redskins and the Phoenix. There were a lot of good-humored jokes between the "Penises" and the "Foreskins". Also they had flown each other's aircraft to get a better understanding of what was required to accomplish the missions. The Redskin pilots couldn't believe that we could get Hueys into those tiny landing zones. When a Redskin pilot was killed, it affected the Phoenix pilots also since we knew each other. The Redskin pilots took their job of protecting the troop ships very seriously and could be counted on to provide the best gun coverage possible. One afternoon during a combat assault south of Camp Evans, one of the Redskin Cobras had a maintenance problem and returned to Camp Evans. That left one Cobra to cover the five assault ships. Redskin lead announced to the flight that he was out of ammo but not to worry since his co-pilot had opened the canopy and was firing his .38 caliber pistol. The pistol was a Smith and Wesson revolver and only contained six rounds before you had to reload the revolver. Fortunately the LZ was cold (no enemy fire) or the NVA were laughing them selves silly but we were able to get all of the troops on the ground without any casualties.

Our days were filled with flying combats assaults one day and the next day you would be flying re-supply or any number of different "ash and trash" missions or occasionally a day off. During the summer, some crews would take their aircraft to the river to wash them. You would land on a sandbar in the middle of the river and then you would have

flowing water to use in cleaning the aircraft. Lt Gary Earls remembers one occasion in the Ashau Valley while waiting to take a reaction force to a destination; we polished our aircraft with automobile wax much to the dismay of our non-rated maintenance warrant officer (CW3 Boykin). Another time while waiting outside the concertina wire at Firebase Currahee on the floor of the Ashau Valley, several Phoenix crewmembers decided to have a shooting match to determine who was the best marksman. After several shots were fired at empty tin cans, word was received from the firebase to stop immediately. Being outside the protection of the firebase made the aircraft tempting targets for the North Vietnamese Army but the NVA failed to take advantage of the opportunity.

Flight Operations would receive the next day's missions at 2 to 3 o'clock in the morning and then started assigning crews based on the aircraft availability. Operations personnel had to wait until the Maintenance personnel could tell how many aircraft would be available for flight for the next day. Operations also had to keep an "Eagle" flight on standby during the day in case reinforcement for needed for a particular mission.³⁵ The aircraft commanders, crew chiefs and door gunners had already been assigned a particular aircraft so it was a matter of assigning co-pilots to those aircraft while maintaining platoon integrity. Also Operations personnel monitored the individual flight hours so an aviator couldn't exceed the maximum 140 flight hours in a thirty-day period. Any pilot that reached the 140-flight hour maximum had to be grounded for a few days of rest. Once the crew assignments had been met, the operations person coordinated with the charge of quarters on who was to be notified of the next day's flights. The charge of quarter's runner would wake up the co-pilots first so they could preflight the aircraft prior to the mission. The "runner" would have to wake up the crewmember without disturbing the other occupants of the "hooch". Usually the preflight was performed in darkness by flashlight that made the co-pilots vulnerable to a possible enemy sniper shot. Fortunately that never happened. Ronnie McDonald provided some trivia in that the Phoenix was the first and maybe the only unit to have generator powered light sets on the flight line. Ronnie had an AMOC classmate that just happened to be in the G4 shop at Camp Eagle and they made a night flight sling load direct requisition. Battalion staff came over to the Nest the next day, scratching their heads trying to figure out where the lights had come from and how we had managed to get them when nobody else could.²⁰ The crew-chiefs and door gunners would next arrive at the aircraft with the machine guns, ammunition, etc. Most crew-chiefs kept a case of C-rations on the aircraft so at least you wouldn't starve until you got back to Camp Evans. The door gunners were primarily infantrymen who had spent time in regular infantry units and then applied to fly as door gunners. The door gunners were also expert chefs with "C" rations, which came in handy during waiting periods for the next flight. They could turn a very bland meal into one that a New York gourmet would envy. A little water mixed with cocoa could be heated to make a chocolate sauce for the pound cake that was the desert in one of the C ration meals. An empty C-ration could be filled with dirt or sand and some JP-4 fuel would be used as a stove or you could put the cans on the engine deck to warm them up before eating.⁴

Missions for 101st aviation units included supporting the 101st Division, 1st ARVN Division; 3rd Marine Recon; 1st Brigade of 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized); and Special Forces Command and Control North. The 158th provided General Support; Direct Support

to the 3rd Brigade; Direct Support to 1st Brigade of the 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized). Each month the three 158th lift companies rotated assignments. Missions included were Division Standby, Sniffer (Odor Detector), Flare ship, Nighthawk, Psychological Operation (psyops), and Brigade Courier. Different missions required flexibility to adjust to the changing requirements. The 158th Aviation Battalion did the first night time battalion size combat assault in the lowlands east of QL1 to demonstrate to the VC and NVA that we could operate at night. Of course it attracted all of the command from the Division Commander on down to see a battalion size night assault. Additionally the Phoenix did a joint combat assault operation with the Vietnamese Air Force Hueys in the fall of 1969. Fortunately the Phoenix had Phillippe Las Hermes who had a dual citizenship of the United States and France. "Frenchy" father was French and his mother was a US citizen. He grew up in France so he spoke French fluently. LasHermes had joined the Army to become an Army aviator so he could increase his flight time. His plan was to have an air transport rating so he could become an airline pilot. So when the joint operation was conducted, Frenchy was in the trail (last) aircraft so any of the VNAF aircraft that started to stray from the formation, Frenchy spoke French to the VNAF, which they understood and any communication problem was quickly corrected. ⁴

Working with the Army of South Viet Nam could be an exercise in patience on some days. The average South Vietnamese soldier didn't speak English so the crew-chiefs and door-gunners spent a lot of time using hand gestures. The ARVN troops would carry live chickens with them, which would be used later as an evening meal. During one combat assault, Skip Lee and Gary Earls were the pilots of one aircraft when the crew-chief told Skip that the soldier sitting behind Earls had stolen Skip's camera and the strap was hanging slightly out of the man's shirt. Skip had served his first tour in the 173rd Airborne Brigade so he took out his pistol and cocked it and motioned to the man to return the camera. Earls, who was the section leader was asking Skip not to shoot the man since Earls would have to fill out all of the paperwork with the explanation of what happened to the ARVN soldier. Fortunately, the ARVN soldier understood Skip's message and returned the camera to where he had found it. CWO John Beeson had a dog-named "Lady" as a pet that hated the Vietnamese. The dog would fly with Beeson and during operations with South Vietnamese bark at the ARVN soldiers until they departed the aircraft. It was ironic that a dog born in Viet Nam despised the South Vietnamese. ⁴

Command and Control North was a part of the Special Forces, MACV-SOG. These missions usually were conducted in Laos or North Viet Nam and the rules were different from other operations. The North Vietnamese in those areas were not known to take prisoners. There was a rumor that they offered a bounty for capturing aircrews, dead or alive. You were allowed to make one attempt to get the team out. If not then they were on their own. If you were shot down then there was only one chance for extraction since the North Vietnamese would set up an ambush for the second attempt. By mid 1969 the NVA were assigning specially trained battalions to areas known to attract Special Forces recon teams. Enemy trackers would track the US Recon team so the team would have a difficult time extracting by air. The enemy battalion would use its firepower to destroy the rescuing aircraft and the Recon teams. It was almost a suicide mission for the US forces. ³⁹ An example of a CCN mission that required flexibility happened to the section leader, Captain

John Trotter and his flight. John was the flight lead with CWO Bruce Fairley as his copilot. The other two aircraft commanders were CWO Bill Majors and CWO Steve Lewis. Bill had made the first landing in the landing zone with equipment to make the area larger. After the landing area was larger, Trotter and Fairley descended into the landing zone.¹²⁷ As John and Bruce picked up the first portion of the Special Forces team when an enemy .51 caliber machine gun began firing on their aircraft. It looked like they would have to land in a little clearing near that LZ and possibly become prisoners of war since their aircraft instruments were indicating that they were losing power and electrical systems. Not to mention the damage to the aircraft structure. Suddenly the engine surged and John got a little altitude until the engine RPM decreased. When the engine RPM increased, John would get some altitude and they would fly a little longer, further and further away from the hot LZ and the North Vietnamese Army. Bruce turned to John and said in his Georgia drawl, "John, if you can fly this aircraft, I can talk on the radio". The flight path looked like a car on a roller coaster track but they got everyone out of the danger zone. That aircraft would never fly again but it proved the reliability of the UH-1 since there were so many bullet holes that we stopped counting at two hundred. Bill Major's aircraft was the next aircraft to pick up the next portion of the team and his aircraft took hits in the fuel cell. Bill related that the Forward Air Controller informed him that he was losing fuel. One of the team members had a sucking chest wound so every time the FAC told him about the fuel, Bill stated that he just added more airspeed until he reached maximum airspeed. He was more concerned about getting that team member to medical care. They landed in the Ashau Valley. Aircraft 604 was hooked back to the Phoenix's Nest. It was up on jacks in the hanger when one of the jacks failed which resulted in further damage. It was determined that the damage was so extensive it had to be taken down to the heavy aircraft maintenance unit in DaNang. Enroute, the Chinook had a hook failure and 604 met its demise in the South China Sea. John Kamps was Bill's co-pilot on this mission. John had bullet holes in his hat which was laying on the top of the instrument panel. In 2015 John still has the hat. Steve's aircraft received some hits but it was flyable.

This was the mission that Bob Andrews and Bob Watkins of the Redskins (D/158th) crashed their Cobra trying to cover one of our downed Hueys. Skip Lee and Watkins were both instructors in the same section in the aviation maintenance school at Fort Eustis, Virginia prior to them attending flight school.²⁸ Everyone in the "Phoenix" looked for Andrews and Watkins after they went down even after the "official" search was called off. We would stretch our flight paths or take deviations to a location in hopes of spotting Andrews and Watkins. The "pink team" from 'B' Troop, 2nd/17th Cavalry rescued Andrews after several days. It was believed that Andrews had crash-landed some where in Laos. He had to swim across a river or wide creek and almost drown and he had injured his jaw in the crash. He survived by eating bugs to maintain his energy. It took several days for Bob to walk into an abandoned firebase in the Ashau Valley where he was found by the pink team. Bob found an old newspaper and a pencil and sat down to write his memoirs when he was able to signal the rescue team. 4 The pilots from the 2/17th Cavalry were amazed as seeing the 158th Hueys, primarily the Phoenix flying low above the jungle canopy looking for Andrews and Watkins.⁵³ It was an example of the closeness of the Phoenix and Redskin pilots. Unfortunately Watkins' body was never recovered.⁴

Sometimes luck was with the Phoenix, CPT Bill Brown was flying in Laos on a CCN mission, returning to South Viet Nam when a fire detector light illuminated. Bill decided to land on a sand bar to check out the light since he didn't know if the engine was on fire or if it was a false alarm. Fortunately it was a false alarm and the North Vietnamese were not alerted so they returned to South Viet Nam undetected. They would have been easy targets for the North Vietnamese.²⁷ Ken Mayberry remembers that this happened in late February or early March, 1970. They flew out of Marble Mountain near DaNang and headed southwest. It was a team of four Hueys and four Cobra gunships for a hurry up scramble extraction. The cobras flew ahead because the team had been compromised and were in contact with the enemy. The Hueys flew to a US Marine firebase next to the border to top off with fuel. Ken remembers that there were a lot of monkeys around the base. After topping off with fuel they headed on across the border into Laos and he knew if they had to top off with fuel that they were going deep into Laos. Ken recalls that they were one of the chase birds and Phil Hickey was piloting one of the extraction birds. The CCN team had broke contact with the enemy with the aid of the Cobras. The extraction occurred at the base of a cloud encrusted mountain and it was going to be a string extraction. While the first aircraft was hovering, a few tracers came up toward the aircraft. Hickey was in the second aircraft and he took a lot more fire because you could see more tracers coming up though the trees. You knew that they were shooting at the sound because they couldn't see the aircraft. Soon Hickey started to pull pitch, the cloud cover moved lower and his aircraft vanished in the clouds. Soon the team appeared above the trees and as soon as they appeared, they vanished in the cloud behind Hickey. They next heard Hickey calling to stay clear because he was descending. Hickey quickly appeared out of the cloud and at that point we started for home. Ken remembers that mission because of Hickey vanishing into that cloud. He was astounded that anybody could hover with men dangling 120 feet below in a cloud. He stood in awe of Hickey.

As (Brown and Mayberry) were headed back to civilization when the fire detector light came on. Brown went into autorotation and spotted the sandbar. After landing on the sandbar, the crew checked the engine and realized it was just a false alarm. As they were sitting there Mayberry looked up and saw the huge sides of a deep canyon walls on both sides and thought "how in the hell are we going to get out of here alive". However we took off and no shots were fired. Thank God. 109 Bill Brown remembers that they were about 35 kilometers into Laos and the North Vietnamese wanted to knock down a couple of aircraft to prove to the American people that we did have troops in Laos. 110

On September 27, 1969, all of the 101st units had pulled out of the Ashau Valley, thus closing one chapter in the division's history. The Ashau Valley would have been difficult to defend against the North Vietnamese Army during the upcoming monsoon season. Low hanging clouds and unpredictable weather was the biggest factors in abandoning the valley. The same had happened to the 1st Cavalry Division when they operated in the I Corps area.

On October 31, 1969 Phoenix 26 and Phoenix 22 received a May Day call from a Ranger team in the vicinity of Firebase Spear. The team was surrounded and was requesting to be extracted as soon as possible. The team's call sign was "Worm Leader".

The decision was made by higher headquarters to have the 2/17th Cavalry aircraft to extract the team. ⁹⁵

On November 12, 1969 there was a tactical emergency along the Demilitarized Zone. All of the available Phoenix aircraft (18 out of 20) were sent to Quang Tri along with many other 101st aircraft to support the 1st Brigade of the 5th Mechanized Division. We were pulled off of doing a combat assault and told by Phoenix operations to refuel the aircraft and return to the Nest so the aircraft commanders could get a briefing on the mission at the DMZ. ⁴ The story was that a North Vietnamese Army battalion or larger unit was attempting to cross the DMZ and the 5th Mech was in heavy contact with the enemy. There was a flight of fifteen to twenty CH-47 Chinook helicopters flying North to Quang Tri. They were carrying the troops from the Second Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment. ¹⁰² The troops transferred to Hueys from the 158th to be transported to landing zones in the demilitarized zone. We arrived at Quang Tri and shut down to await further orders. We didn't insert the troops and returned back to Camp Evans later in the afternoon. ⁴

In November 1969 there was a storm that dumped more than fifty inches of rain during a seven-day period. ⁵⁷ On November 21, 1969 there was a large night combat assault with fourteen slicks, one command and control aircraft and one flare ship for the 3/187 Infantry Battalion. ⁹⁶

There was an artillery raid for the Third Brigade on the 16th of January 1970 into the Ashau Valley. The artillery guns were placed on FSB Shepard and became firing on suspected targets. This was done as psychological operation against the North Vietnamese who thought they were safe in the Ashau Valley during the monsoon season. The guns and supporting troops were extracted on the same afternoon. The mission was a complete success without incident. ⁴² The Phoenix flew the troops into the abandoned firebase, possibly Airborne for the raid.

The Phoenix continued to fly missions and hadn't lost anyone to hostile action until December 21st when Captain Arthur Herndon, WO Thomas Forsythe and Specialist 4 David L. Egleston were killed while flying a mission near the DMZ in the vicinity of Charlie 2. The mission was to inset a long-range reconnaissance patrol into the area. The patrol was from Company P, 75th Rangers, which was a part of the 5th Mechanized Division. They were caught in a cross fire of .51 caliber machine guns. One of the Rangers who survived stated that Herndon and Forsythe were hit in the head by the .51 caliber rounds. The aircraft went up about three hundred feet in altitude and then crashed. The aircraft was upside down. "Twiggy" Miller was told by Specialist Amos that Herndon climbed out of the landing zone with a normal rate of climb along a ridge line. He stated that the 51 caliber rounds had severed the main rotor blades and that Forsythe was hit in the neck. ¹³⁴ Specialist Mike Amos survived the crash by jumping from the aircraft just prior to impact. He would survive another crash less than two months later by jumping from the aircraft that was piloted by CPT Donald Swanson. CWO Bob Sauer had piloted an aircraft in the area of the DMZ on December 20th, and the aircraft had taken enemy fire.

Sauer had given a spent round from that action to Tom Forsythe who wanted it as a good luck charm. Unfortunately it wasn't a good enough luck charm. ²⁴ CPT. Gary Elliott and CW2 John Hodnett were sent to identify the remains and obtain their personal effects.

On January 29, 1970, the Phoenix lost another flight crew. One of the most respected platoon leaders was Captain Donald Swanson. Swanson had been involved in the nightclub business in Reno, Nevada and he talked often about returning to that business after he left the US Army. Swanson had worked at "Harrah's". Roy (Twiggy) Miller and Don Swanson spent hours playing the card game; "Casino" and they would talk about the Harrah's car collection. ³⁷ He was instrumental in setting up the Phoenix Officer's Club. He always had a big smile when he was tending bar at the Phoenix club. Swanson was very proud of how the club had developed into a refuge from the rigors of combat. Swanson had recently returned from leave in Australia where he had met a young lady that he wanted to spend more time at a future opportunity. ⁷⁰

Swanson was the flight lead of a three ship Phoenix flight. They were a part of a Landing Zone (LZ) expansion mission. They also had a two-ship team from the Redskins as protective cover for the mission. This landing zone was possibly near LZ Helen. The area was on the backside of a mountain range due west of Camp Evans. They had inserted the expansion team into a tight LZ on a small knoll below the backside of the first or second ridgeline. ⁷² General John Wright, the CG of the 101st began a program to have a landing zone per Grid Square. Sometimes the mission would require that when you got to the assigned position, you hovered the aircraft in position while the engineers would repel out of the aircraft with their equipment and then cut the landing zone. While you were hovering just above the trees you were very vulnerable to ground fire. After refueling, the flight split off into a two-ship flight while the third ship remained to do other missions. Swanny, Frenchy, Jack Glennon and Bruce Ianacone were sent North to a mountain region near Khe Shan on a mission to find and rescue a LRRP (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol) team that was being chased by the North Vietnamese Army unit. This was near the end of the monsoon season and there were low hanging clouds as we approached the team's last known position. Soon we were flying extremely low level underneath a 500-foot solid overcast. We were flying between 60-80 knots in a fairly close trail formation along with our Redskin escorts up and down valleys trying to contact and find the six man LRRP team. Because of our low altitude and terrain we had difficulty establishing contact with the team. After some 20-30 minutes of flying up and down valleys and sometimes having to backtrack when clouds prevented us going further, we made contact and started using the teams radio for a DF (Directional Finding) steer. After circling one small mountain, we finally determined the team was on top (in the clouds) but luckily not in actual contact with the NVA at that particular time. Once Swanny realized where the team was, he came to a hover near the bottom of the low hanging overcast and told the rest of us to stand-by below. What felt like an eternity later but probably only 1-2 minutes, Swanny called out over the radio that he had found them on top in a small clearing. He picked the team up and performed an ITO (Instrument Take Off) through the

clouds to VFR (visual flight rules) on top conditions. We proceeded to back out the way we came in (Low level underneath) until we found a break in the clouds and were able to rejoin as a flight. We dropped the team off (I think at Quang Tri) then headed back to Evans to refuel and head out for the second portion of the LZ expansion mission. We left the Redskins to refuel behind us and headed a few clicks (kilometers) south of where we dropped off the engineers to pick up the first load of what was to be a company of grunts (infantrymen) in a single ship fly-through LZ right on the first ridgeline and headed toward the LZ. Swanny made radio contact with the Redskins who had just lifted off from Evans and elected to start the insertion before they got overhead.⁷²

Jack Glennon remembered, "Sometime that afternoon we started back into the now cleared LZ to extract the troops on the ground. As usual with single ship LZ (landing zone), we lined up with 60-second separation between aircraft in order to give each aircraft enough time to land, load up, and depart. Swanson and LasHermes were flying the first aircraft; Jack Glennon and Bruce lanacone were flying the second (aircraft). They landed and loaded up, and by that time I was on pretty short final to land. That's when the explosion occurred and a good part of the aircraft was engulfed in flames. At that point, they lifted off the LZ and flew a few hundred yards and the aircraft just kind of settled into the jungle. I was over them in seconds. To this day I do not remember if I could see the aircraft, I just remember my door gunner wanting me to get him close enough to a 300' tree so he could climb down, I thought it was a heroic gesture, just not very practical at that time. There was nowhere to land so we made a couple of radio calls and flew someplace and picked up a reaction force and inserted them as close as we could get to the crash site.

The Landing Zone that they had been cutting was in a mountainous area with a ridgeline above it. I guess some VC (probably North Vietnamese Army) heard the chain saws, and saw what was going on and knew that a Huey would be along directly to pick them up. He probably set there for hours with a RPG (rocket propelled grenade) just waiting for his chance."⁴³

Bruce lanacone remembers "Just as he (Swanny) touching down, Charlie (NVA) fired three RPGs from somewhere along the ridgeline overlooking the LZ-one was long, one short, and one landed underneath him just as he (Swanny) touching down and the grunts were getting off. The blast knocked one of the door gunners out onto the ground (I think he lost both legs and eventually died) and the underside caught fire. Whether unaware of the fire before lifting off or thinking it was best to fly to safety anyway, Swanny took off and was soon engulfed in a ball of flames as the fire was being sucked back into the open helicopter. Though we didn't know it at the time, the crew chief (who had been the lone survivor when Herndon and Forsythe were shot down in the DMZ on 21 December, 1969) jumped out while Swanny was flying about 100 feet above mostly bare treetops and was discovered the next day. Swanny's ship went down about a km (kilometer) from the LZ when the fire likely burned through the tail boom and he lost control. We arrived overhead his position within seconds and the chopper was a burning wreck. We were surprised to see Frenchy standing beside the wreckage waving his arms. There was no place to set down so we hovered around the tree tops until we found a

place where we could get next to a tall bare tree that had little or no branches on top, in an effort to allow one of the crew chiefs to shimmy down and try to help Frenchy. I do not recall, however, whether we succeeded (though I think not). I remember we eventually continued on the mission and made several runs back and forth between the LZ and PZ (pick-up zone) inserting grunts but only after the Redskins had made numerous passes shooting nails (fleschette rockets) into the hillside and ridgeline above the LZ. For his actions, CPT Swanson was put in for a Silver Star, posthumously, but I do not know whether he was ever awarded it. “⁷² Warrant Officer Jack Glennon couldn't believe that anyone could survive the crash. Crew chief Mike Amos jumped from his seat in the tumbling Huey. Remarkably Amos survived the fall and was picked up by a Medevac Huey the next day. ¹⁰ La Hermes died on the hospital ship or in Japan on February 14, 1970. Specialist Mahlon R. Arnett was listed as Missing In Action. ⁵ It was ironic that "Frenchy" Las Hermes received his draft notice from the French Army that fall. He boasted in the Phoenix club, "What are they going to do to me if I don't show up, Send me to Viet Nam". Of course everyone got a good laugh from that statement. Also Phillippe's father had flown in World War 1 and had served at Dien Bien Phu with the French Foreign Legion. ²⁵ LasHermes had joined the Army to get more flight time so he could obtain an Airline Transport Rating. "Frenchy Las Hermes would get "care packages" from France and create gourmet meals for his hootch mates. ³⁷ Lannie Van Tassel saw Mike Amos in Fort Carson, Colorado in late 1970. The doctors had done a great job on his burns and most could hardly be seen. "He was sporting a hard limp and used a cane but was in good spirits for some one who was the sole survivor on two shoot downs. He was also with Captain Herndon when his ship went down in the DMZ. He was driving a sporty Mustang GT and was talking about getting a medical discharge at that time." ⁴⁴

The Phoenix had passed their first year in Viet Nam but they were going to be tested again and again. Each time they met the challenge. The Third Brigade area of operations was about 1300 square kilometers or 800 square miles. ⁶⁵ Initially troops were supposed to be landed in a landing zone west of Ripcord known as Hill 902. The Air Force had bombed that hill. The landing zone was covered with fog which made a landing almost impossible. Randy House told the officer in charge that they had better use the alternate landing zone which was Ripcord. Ripcord was originally a firebase used by the First Cavalry Division in 1968 and later by the 101st in 1969. ¹³⁷ On April 1, 1970 they airlifted troops from B/2/506th into Firebase Ripcord. CPT. Randy House was the flight lead that did the initial insertion into Firebase Ripcord This action pitted one infantry battalion against a much larger North Vietnamese Army Division. Ripcord was located on the eastern edge of the A Shau Valley. The firebase was under almost continuous contact with the North Vietnamese Army who didn't want the 101st to establish any base near the Ashau Valley. Ripcord was the 101st's last chance to do significant damage to the NVA before the division was withdrawn as a part of the program to turn the fighting back to the South Vietnamese forces. ³⁴ Butch Doan and his crew had to spend the night on Ripcord when they we weathered in. They were able to leave the next morning. ⁸⁸ There were a lot of grenades and mortar rounds sent out because the infantry were worried that they would get hit with incoming rounds. When the fog lifted about 2AM they were able to leave Ripcord. ⁸⁹ On July 21st MG Sidney Berry, CG of the 101st made the decision to

evacuate Ripcord. It was later learned that the NVA was gathering a great deal of intelligence information by listening to US radio nets. ⁶⁵

The planning for the extraction of Firebase Ripcord had occurred on the nights of July 21st and 22nd with contingency plans according to Randy House. ¹³⁷

On July 23, 1970 LTC Andre C. Lucas, the battalion commander of 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment was wounded about 9:15 AM. CPT Randy House went in to evacuate Lucas from Ripcord. Flying a single Huey escorted by four Cobras. Lucas was boarded on to the aircraft and House made a direct flight to the aid station at Camp Evans. Lucas died on the pad of the aid station.

The plan was that the Phoenix aircraft would go in first followed by the Ghostriders (A/158) and then the Kingsman (B/101). Every aviation asset of the 101st was being utilized in the extraction. There were sixty three slicks used at Ripcord that day. There were three different landing pads and the NVA was firing at one pad at a time. House coordinated with the pathfinder and would direct aircraft to the landing pad that was clear. That maneuver saved a lot of lives and aircraft. ¹³⁷

Ken Mayberry recalled that mass confusion reigned and that every flight had made a go-around trying to get into Ripcord. ³⁶ There were flights of ten aircraft orbiting everywhere from the flats in the Firebase Jack area. The air mission commander's radios were breaking up and he couldn't communicate with us. ³⁴ CPT. Randy House was the flight lead for the Phoenix. After twenty minutes of orbiting, CPT House left his flight to make an evaluation of the situation due to communications problems. House was unable to make contact with the command and control aircraft but made contact with the pathfinder at Ripcord. He decided to continue the extraction. They used the waterfall north of Ripcord as a marker to begin inbound approach. ³⁶ House directed his choppers to the available landing areas. As the extraction continued, the pathfinders instructed some birds to land on different pads, but the NVA were clearly listening in on their communications. House was playing a "shell" game, sending the lift ships one at a time so the pathfinders could wave each approaching pilot to the pad, which was taking the least amount of mortar fire at that moment. Once the troops were aboard, the pilot would pick up the aircraft to a hover, back past the edge of the base, make a pedal turn then dive down the northeast side of the hill to avoid enemy fire, which was coming in from the west and the southeast. ³⁴ As the evacuation continued, Warrant Officer Ken Mayberry was serving as an aircraft commander, with Warrant Officer David Rayburn as his co-pilot. As Mayberry and Rayburn's chopper approached the landing zone, Rayburn was dismayed by the ferocity of the mortar fire. Both pilots were experienced combat veterans and had taken hits on multiple occasions. The scene reminded Mayberry of one equally hot extraction he had participated in south of Ripcord, at LZ Kelley, where he had flown through a wall of tracers and was rocked by an airburst that nearly nosed him into a mountain. Of twenty Hueys in that earlier operation, only four aircraft had remained flyable after the extraction.

Mayberry and Rayburn grimly continued their approach. Mayberry counted nine mortar shells exploding around the landing pad he was headed for. He also saw six GIs standing in the open, waiting for him. Someone radioed him, "Go around!" but Mayberry replied, "We're going in."

Rayburn looked over at Mayberry and said, "Ken, are you sure you want to do this?" Mayberry kept looking straight ahead, watching the LZ they were approaching. Finally he said, "We're their only way out, and if we don't get them...." Both knew that they all stood between the troops on the ground and the NVA surrounding them. Their unwillingness to give up on what was clearly a very dangerous rescue mission was typical of the resolve demonstrated by many warrant officers who flew Army helicopters in Vietnam. It was an unspoken, solemn vow. The Phoenix crews would do their best, no matter what.

As they made their final approach, the fire got heavier; Mayberry slammed the Huey down amid exploding mortars while six heavily laden soldiers rushed for the helicopter. A mortar round hit in front of the soldiers, and a second round impacted just behind them. The infantrymen were thrown to the ground, all of them badly wounded.

Mayberry shouted to his crew chief, Specialist 5 John Ackerman, and door gunner, Specialist 4 Wayne Wasilk, "Get them!" The two young South Dakotans rushed twenty yards through the mortar fire, helped four of the wounded infantrymen up and carried them to the helicopter. Fire continued to fall all around them. It seemed to Rayburn that he could feel the AK-47 rounds and mortar fragments peppering the Huey as if the helicopter's skin were his own.

Mayberry looked over his right shoulder, though the cargo door to his right rear. Mortar rounds were being walked up the mountainside as he watched. He held his breath, waiting for the next hit. The crew chief and the door gunner struggled to get the injured men into the cargo bay. Mayberry was witness to one of the greatest acts of heroism that he had ever seen. Because they were on the ground longer than necessary, there were other pilots calling him to ask if they were okay. Mayberry couldn't answer, afraid that he might break the spell if he answered. One mortar round and they all would be killed.¹³⁷ The crew chief shouted, "Go! Go!" and Mayberry lifted off into the clouds of fragmentation. Moments later, a second chopper, piloted by Warrant Officer Dave Wolfe, came in and picked up another group of six soldiers-again under heavy fire. At the same time, Wolfe thought that his bird had suffered amazingly minor damage during the pickup. There had been no wounds to his crew or the passengers.

Flying behind Mayberry's Huey, Wolfe called Mayberry on the aviation net (VHF) in a state of amazement and disbelief. Wolfe disregarded all normal radio procedures (which typically involved using call signs and waiting for replies), announcing to Mayberry: "Ken, you're smoking, I don't see flames, but there is smoke everywhere. You're losing fuel. There are pieces falling off everywhere. I think you better put that thing down now." Both Hueys were still ten miles west of Camp Evans, over the Annamite mountain range.

Mayberry came on the radio and responded, " I've got a little vibration. I might be losing some instruments. All my packs (passengers) are badly wounded, so I'm going direct to Charlie Med. Pad (187th Mobile Army surgical Hospital); we'll check it out there." Specialist 5 Larry Frazier, Wolfe's crew chief, watched Mayberry's limping Huey, amazed that it was still flying and relieved that his bird was not in the same condition.

Mayberry and Rayburn carefully piloted their bird (67-17606) back to base. On the ground, they counted more than forty holes from enemy fire. Aircraft #606 was determined to have too much structural damage to be repaired. It's last flight was under the belly of a CH-47 Chinook bound for Danang.⁸¹ Their close shave did not stop them for long, however. As soon as they could get a replacement aircraft, they continued to extract troops from "hover holes" below the mountaintop. Ken Mayberry noticed blood on his boot when he took his crew to get a replacement aircraft. Later that night Ken discovered that the blood had come from the shrapnel embedded in the calf of his leg.⁶⁵

Frazier had helped six infantrymen scramble abroad under fire at Ripcord. Shortly after they lifted off, a rifleman motioned to Frazier and handed him a piece of paper that he had taken from his pocket. Frazier read what was written on it and handed it to the pilots. It read, "Thanks for saving our Asses." It was a heartfelt thanks Frazier would not forget. He was impressed that the GI had written it under artillery bombardment, before being picked up. The GI knew the birds would get them out, no matter what.

After the operation ended, Wolfe flew back to refuel at Camp Evans, Frazier hopped down from his crew chief's well and walked forward to open Wolfe's door and move his sliding armor plate back. As he reached for the pilot's door handle, he was startled to see Wolfe's "air-conditioning." Frazier pointed out the damage and the trajectory of the enemy rounds that had holed the bird--many had hit very close to Wolfe's seat. The lower part of his pilot's door had been blown away by rounds passing through the nose radio compartment, exiting under Wolfe's legs, through the left pilot's door. They also found several holes in the fuselage under the door gunner's seat. Frazier later joked about Wolfe's reaction: "If he hadn't been sitting down, he might've collapsed." Wolfe had been so distracted by the damage to Mayberry's Huey that he had been unaware of just how badly his own bird had been hit.

Captain House, still circling above Ripcord, continued the extraction with the other aircraft companies. They were circling in sight of Ripcord, keeping an eye on the deadly landing zones marked by mortar explosions. House continued to fill the position of command and control. He had just seen his Hueys getting shot to hell while getting the job done. Painfully aware that there were troops still waiting for extraction on the firebase, House understood the importance in the role of impromptu air mission commander. He figured the sooner they finished, the better. House had the reputation of being one of the "gutsiest" Phoenix pilots.⁶⁸

Operations in the area around Firebase Ripcord had proved to be a costly undertaking. The human cost of Ripcord was 269 Americans killed, more than 1300 wounded, and eighteen missing in action. Enemy losses estimated to be 1273 enemy killed in action,⁷³

killed by artillery, and 377 killed by helicopters. ¹³⁷ Between April 1 and July 31, 1970, 135 Hueys were seriously damaged and rendered unflyable. The vast majority of the division pilots and crewmembers survived despite combat damage to their aircraft. ⁶ The Phoenix had passed another test but the North Vietnamese had not seen the last of the Phoenix crews. The Phoenix would encounter the same NVA anti-aircraft guns during Lam Son 719. Ashau Valley operations in the 1970s were jungle games of hide and go kill according to John Del Vecchio, author of "The 13th Valley". The American owned the air and the NVA ruled underground, and the jungle was neutral. The 13th Valley (Khe Ta Laou Valley) was a tributary of the Ashau and the 101st had reliable intelligence that a high communist headquarters was located in the valley as well as an NVA regiment and a transportation battalion. ⁸⁴ The Phoenix flew infantry units into the 13th Valley looking for the NVA.

Ken Mayberry related a personal experience about the hazards of night flying while on duty along the DMZ:

This article was in the August 2010 VFW magazine, and when I seen the headline a flood of long-lost memories came rushing back. I wrote this almost 2 years ago and have been sitting on it. Here's my story.

This is a story about Target Fixation. You've heard the stories about a formation of jets all flying into the ground, Flight lead flies into the ground and his wing men follow him because they are so fixed on the lead aircraft. **You lose all peripheral vision.** That's target fixation. And I got it this night.

In 1970 my platoon was doing two weeks TDY in Quang Tri VN. ((by the way, we loved doing temporary duty at Quang Tri, very relaxed atmosphere, no shave, no shined boots, no haircuts, it was like an in country R&R). In the middle the night I got rousted out to fly, we received a emergency ammo resupply mission, firebase Henderson was under siege and they were running low on ammunition. We took off with three aircraft got our ammo and grenade resupply and headed for firebase Henderson which was Southwest of Quang Tri overlooking the Ba Long Valley. Our aircraft took a 45 seconds separation between aircraft, I was chalk three/trail in our flight of three. In route Henderson we got a call from the firebase warning us to stay high in altitude due to Chinooks departing the firebase low level, blacked out flying down the valley.

You have to understand night in Vietnam was DARK so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your face dark. Henderson was a bald knob on top of a mountain which due to illumination flares glowed in the dark. It was like looking at a lantern in the middle of a cave. We approached Henderson from the north, we passed east of the firebase had to do 180° turn to the right to

land on the SW side of the firebase. We all had to lose a lot of altitude in the process. After making my 180° turn and start my descent I was visually locked on the LZ. During my approach my right seat said "aren't you getting a little low?" Of course being the hotshot pilot I was I ignored him. All appeared to be going just fine, I was locked onto the firebase and suddenly it vanished, it went dark and my door gunner is yelling TREES TREES TREES over the intercom!

I recognized immediately what I had done, I had descended into a valley between me and the firebase and I was flying into a wall of rock! Now try to picture this, a lot of things happened simultaneously. When Henderson vanished I immediately pulled the cyclic stick into my gut, pitching the nose up basically standing the aircraft on its tail and pulled all the power I could get. I pulled the guts out of it! I had to stop my descent, stop my forward movement and gain altitude as fast as I could. It worked! Soon the firebase became visible which was a big sigh of relief for everyone on board.

We shot a normal approach but man you can see the fire base was catching hell. Tracers going both directions and flashes of explosions and muzzle flashes everywhere. But what really caught our eye were flame throwers going off underneath us as we crossed the perimeter wire. Man was that a sight especially when we realized it was enemy flame throwers that were being shot into the base instead of out of the base.

That was the only time during my tour that I saw flamethrowers at work. When you see them at night – impressive! I came within seconds of having my name on the VN Wall. It was also during this time of my one year tour that I sat down and reevaluated myself. I thought about all of the crazy things I had been doing and being involved in and realized that my time was getting short. I thought about the three crews we had already lost. I decided it was time for me to back off a little.

I became the company IP. Every pilot is required to have a check ride every 90 days. I was trained at Rucker to be an instructor pilot before I went to Vietnam. So the last quarter of my tour was spent as one of the company IP's. I still came home with over 1300 hrs which was about average. So you can see I was a high time pilot. I've often wondered how many hours I would've had if I had remained with my platoon.

When I came home from VN I had hundreds of stories like this. They are now lost in the clouds of time. Although sometime ask me about the time Butch and I went deer hunting and wound up in middle of an artillery strike or when I got into a crossfire with two 51's on CCN or the time I went inadvertent IFR

with two cobras while pulling a sling load or the time I got instant vertigo at night shooting an approach to a creek bank or yada yada yada-----

I'm sure I was not the first nor the last to have this happen to him. It does lead me to wonder how many pilots did the same thing but were unable to recognize what happened. It makes one wonder how many pilots vanished at night and no one ever knew what happened. How many were never located???

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On May 6, 1970 the Phoenix endured another loss when the aircraft (66-16707) piloted by CWO Clifford Poe had a mid air collision with an aircraft from Company B, 158th Aviation Battalion (68-15663). The rest of Poe's crew was Warrant Officer Roger Baxter, Specialist 5 Allen Kinne and a maintenance specialist, Allen H. Nohl. Nohl, the maintenance guy was there for the experience of the assault and was flying in the door gunner's position (right side of the aircraft). Kinne was a very good friend of Larry Frazier and Kinne had just returned from a thirty day leave. While he was on the leave, his aircraft was converted to a smoke ship. Kinne had asked Nohl to fill in as crewchief on 707 until Kinne returned from leave. Nohl was showing Kinne how the new system operated. Poe's aircraft was the lead aircraft in a flight of two in an echelon right formation. Their mission was to provide cover for the lift aircraft by using oil generated smoke and CS gas. The ships were being utilized in Landing Zone Miller (XD 973360).⁴² They were making a left hand turn around the hill top. Nohl remembers that the Lancer aircraft was coming straight at them and he tried to get Poe to drop prior to the Lancer aircraft skids hitting the rotor blades of 707. Allen Nohl believes that the Lancer aircraft had received enemy fire or had encountered the CS gas. The Lancer bird exploded in mid-air. Poe's aircraft fell through the triple canopy jungle and Nohl was still strapped in the aircraft to about six feet above the ground. After the collision, there was a huge fire. Nohl had first and second degree burns on his back side and arms, burns on his wrists where the gloves and sleeves of the Nomex shirt joined and his neck chin and face below the helmet visor.¹⁰³ Rick Carlton believes that Nohl was ejected from the aircraft before it hit the ground.⁷⁴ Nohl found that Poe was conscious and attempting to get out of the aircraft. The aircraft exploded and the Nohl was knocked clear of the blast.⁷³ Nohl attempted to get back to 707 to help others but it was too late. About five to ten minutes later, there was a Light Observation Helicopter (LOH) with a mini-gun hovering/covering overhead and saw Nohl waving. Nohl has been in contact with pilot, Mike Jones, callsign-Hawk 39. Nohl was rescued by a rope lowered to him by the command and control aircraft (a Lancer aircraft). Nohl tied the rope around his torso just under his arms and the C & C aircraft lifted out of the jungle somewhat bouncing and crawling through the jungle treetops. They flew with Nohl hanging below until the nearest firebase which he believed was ten to fifteen miles away. They landed and put him on a stretcher and flew him to a hospital. He got to the first medical facility and since he was burnt on his neck the doctors sent him on to another medical facility. Also they were overwhelmed with casualties from Firebase Henderson.¹³¹ While at Camp Zama, Japan, Allen Nohl met the pilot who rescued him from the jungle.¹⁰⁰ Rick Carlton spoke to the crew prior to lift off and remembers that Poe didn't mind going on the mission. He also remembers that Phoenix 707 (Carlton thinks it was 563) had oil dripping off the tail boom just prior to the lift and thinks that Poe had already

laid down smoke in another landing zone near the same area. John Kamps spent several hours with Poe the night before and Poe had a premonition of his death. Poe had two or three days before DEROS and had asked to be replaced on the mission. John thinks that it was a CS mission rather than a smoke mission.⁷ Major Gerald Lord, the Phoenix Company Commander, wanted to replace Poe but was ordered by the 158th Battalion Commander to have Poe fly the mission.⁸ The night before the mission Poe had a discussion with his platoon leader, CPT. Randy House about the next day mission. They determined that the smoke ship assignment was safer than being a part of the combat assault.¹³⁰ Nohl remembers that Poe wore cowboy boots and asked Mr. Poe one day "Sir, aren't you out of uniform with those boots?" Poe responded something like, "What are they going to do, send me to war?"¹⁰³ Nohl also remembered that Poe taking the time each day to get his large operational map out and spread it on the floor of the aircraft and explain to the crew what the day's mission would be and where they were going, etc. Bob Sauer remembers that everyone had to wear gas masks during that combat assault because of the possibility of a CS gas attack. Wearing gas masks while flying increased crew workload, made communication difficult and restricted visibility.⁷¹

Roy "Twiggy" Miller went to see Poe's father after he returned from Vietnam.¹³⁴

On May 18, 1970 Warrant Officer Robert K. Cole, Warrant Officer Nicholas G. Saunders, and SGT. Carlton C. Gray were killed at approximately 1845 hours. 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 1LT John Darling and his sergeant, SGT. Harry Stone with them. Darling was the 2nd Infantry Battalion/506th Infantry Regiment Communications Officer. Darling and Stone had hitched a ride with Saunders to go repair another unit's radio.¹³⁷ The Aero-Rifle platoon of Troop B, 2nd of the 17th Cavalry was inserted at YD 355238 to search for the crew and aircraft. The platoon was unsuccessful in their search and was extracted prior to darkness.⁵⁵ Easterling, the crew chief jumped from the aircraft prior to impact and was found on an adjacent ridge at 1400 hours on 19 May.¹⁵ Easterling was rescued by an aircraft from Company "A" 101st Aviation Battalion which was on a mission for the 501st Signal Battalion. The injured crewmember (Easterling) stated that the aircraft was hit by enemy ground fire and attempted to make a forced landing on a landing zone, crashed and rolled down a hill into a canopy covered area. He had no knowledge of the exact location of the aircraft or the other crewmembers.⁵⁵ 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. LT Darling was found with a broken neck.¹⁷ Search was conducted for several days with no contact. Joe Haymore remembers that Easterling had been hiding in a shell crater and had been drinking the rainwater that had collected in the crater.¹⁵ Larry Frazier remembers that Carlton Gray was a brand new door-gunner in December 1969. Gray flew with crew chief, Larry Frazier to recover the bodies of Art Herndon and his crew. Gray was cleaning the M-60s before he and Frazier went on the mission. Neither M-60 fired that day because Gray had forgotten to install the firing pins since they were in a hurry to go on the mission to recover the bodies.¹⁶ 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 by the troops from LZ Ripcord. They had been ordered to search for the body and found it. Cole's father made it to Viet Nam to do his own investigation. Colonel Lord wasn't sure how Mr. Cole accomplished that feat to travel as a civilian to travel to a war zone.⁸ CWO Robert Cole is buried in Hopewell Cemetery which is just North of Oxford, Ohio. 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.⁸

Just before the assault on Ripcord, the ARVN command decided to go into an old Marine Corps firebase, Tun Tavern. The Second Battalion of the 54th ARVN regiment assaulted the base on 31 May, 1970. Four Hundred ARVN soldiers went into Tun Tavern and sixty five were killed by the time of June 3rd when the ARVN command decided to abandon the base. ¹¹⁴ Ken Mayberry remembers that the ARVNs suffered more casualties than what was officially reported. Ken thinks that it was over 300 killed and they had to sling load the bodies back to Dong Ha. They had to remove bodies from the cargo nets because they were overloaded before they could be delivered to the rear areas ¹¹⁵

Then on June 12, 1970, Warrant Officers Tom Tindor and John Wilson were on a combat assault at LZ Kelly. (There is some disagreement on whether Wilson was killed on a combat assault or resupply mission. Bruce Updyke, Butch Doan and Ken Mayberry believe that Wilson was killed somewhere else than LZ Kelly). They were chalk two in the flight when an AK47 round entered through the floor, missing the armored seat, collective and the chicken plate and killed Warrant Officer John Wilson. There was simply nothing anyone could do. Tindor experienced survivor's guilt and personal disgust. A short time later Tindor was called home for a family emergency, never to return to the Phoenix. ¹⁰ LZ Kelly was a very difficult combat assault. Steve Butrym remembers that he was brand new and was flying with Phil Stewart, Phoenix 22 when the insertion into Kelly was suspended because the landing zone came under heavy enemy weapons fire. The infantry in the Landing zone were running out of ammunition and in danger of being overrun. Stewart and Butrym went back and got a load of ammunition and with the help of Cobra gun ships kicked out the ammunition onto the landing zone as they went through. As there we pulling out of there, they went into a small cloud and there was a Cobra coming off of a gun run into the cloud. Lot of excitement as the two aircraft narrowly missed each other. Stewart and Butrym received an Air Medal with Valor device for their resupply mission. ¹¹ Ken Mayberry remembers that Dave Snyder reported an airburst under the tail that nearly inverted his aircraft and when Mayberry left the landing zone, he took an airburst also which put his aircraft into a nearly 90% nose low attitude. There was a lot of battle damage to Phoenix aircraft during the LZ Kelly time.⁴⁷

Then on September 20, 1970, the Phoenix lost another crew when during a low level Ranger team insertion near the DMZ (YD 113725), ¹⁰⁸ Warrant Officer Larry Baldwin, 1LT Albert Finn, SGT William Dotson, and SGT Dan Felts. The Ranger team was from Company P, 75th Rangers which was a part of the 5th Mechanized Infantry Division. This was the same unit that lost a team on December 21, 1969. A Cobra pilot thought that Finn took a .51 caliber round in his windshield just before they hit the ground at 100 knots.

¹⁰ Steve Butrym escorted Finn's chicken plate to DaNang to be tested for a suspected .51 caliber hole.

Fire Base O'Reilly was just five miles northwest of Fire Base Ripcord. ¹⁰⁷ Beginning in August 1970 the NVA increased their attacks on O'Reilly. ⁹ Ken Mayberry says that O'Reilly was worse than Ripcord. He landed and picked up some AK47s near O'Reilly. After they took off, the crewchief said, "Sir, you're not going to believe this, the blood isn't dry on this AK". ¹⁰ O'Reilly was abandoned on October 7, 1970. Typhoons Kate and Louise wreaked havoc in the latter part of the year, and the heavy monsoon rains curtailed combat operations. Those rains killed 293 Vietnamese and left over 200,00 people homeless. The average rainfall in November, 1970 was 29.5 inches and for December the average was 16.5 inches for the coastal plains of the area of operations.

Tragedy occurred on December 7, 1970 when an officer took his own life. It stunned everyone who knew him. As in all wars there are situations where there aren't any explanations.

Tom Marshall wrote in his book, "Price of Exit" that by December 1970, the Phoenix Hueys included replacement aircraft with weak engines. Some were "D" models, which had been converted to early "H" models with weak engines. Plus there were a couple of the newer "H" models with the self-sealing fuel cells.

Occasionally "Lady Luck" would smile on the Phoenix crews. One instance occurred with the crew of the "Nighthawk" aircraft, 68-16065. The aircraft had been assigned to the Phoenix in October 1970 and was configured as a "Nighthawk" aircraft. Nighthawk aircraft had several landing lights mounted together so that it could illuminate an area like it was daylight. On the same side as the lights was a mini-gun, which could fire several thousand rounds per minute. The gunner could vary the sustained rate of fire from two thousand to three thousand rounds per minute up to about six thousand rounds per minute. The Nighthawk missions were to be rotated among the three lift companies monthly. The "Nighthawk" equipment came as a package. It consisted of the mini-gun and the landing lights configuration. ⁶⁹ Don Davis was a newly assigned pilot and had spent the day flying with Warrant Officer Dean Grau on January 25, 1971. Grau wasn't an aircraft commander so he was flying from the right seat and Davis got his first experience flying from the left seat. Davis was assigned to fly the "Nighthawk" that night with Warrant Officer Don Mears who was also flying the aircraft from the right seat. Dick Oder, the Crewchief had been assigned to #065 the previous week but he had experience flying other Nighthawk missions as well as CCN missions. He hadn't met Davis until they met at the revetment where the aircraft was sitting and Oder didn't know Mears that well.

John Robertson was the door gunner and had been an infantryman for a few months prior to his service with the "Phoenix". Oder and Robertson had only been together for about a week prior to the flight. .

As Davis was pre-flighting the Nighthawk aircraft in the late afternoon, Captain Dave Nelson came to Davis and asked if Nelson could borrow Davis' chest protective body armor. Nelson's body armor was in another aircraft that had already departed. Nelson was to take four aircraft and crews to Quang Tri where Command and Control North (CCN) had declared an emergency, which meant that there was the possibility of heavy enemy contact. Nelson needed the body armor so Don Davis loaned the highly respected platoon leader his body armor. ¹⁰

About 11:30 PM the Nighthawk crew was scrambled to assist a sniper team near Firebase Jack. After they lifted off from Camp Evans, Dick Oder moved to his right to man the mini-gun, sitting unrestrained behind Davis in the left side of the aircraft. Oder was sitting on an ammunition can. Robertson left his normal position on the right side of the aircraft and slid into the crew chief's position to man the light. ⁵²

The weather was marginal with low cloud scud and turbulence. They were attempting to maintain visual flight rules despite the solid bank of fog. Eventually both pilots got vertigo at different times. Dick Oder, the crew chief remembers getting vertigo also. Vertigo is where the inner ear deceives the mind to provide false sensory information. Basically your mind is telling you one thing and your instruments are telling you something else. The turbulence combined with the Nighthawk's massive light system; low clouds reflecting the light; and fatigue contributed to the vertigo. Suddenly they encountered an updraft wind current, which propelled them to fifteen hundred feet per minute climb despite reducing the collective pitch control to no power. They leveled off at approximately three thousand feet. Mears contacted the Camp Evans ground control approach (GCA) for an immediate return to Camp Evans. The GCA controller instructed them to make right hand turns to get away from the mountains. Fortunately GCA had been monitoring their flight. Attempting to fly under instrument flight rules from the left seat is very difficult even for an experienced pilot but Davis had been on duty since early that morning and was fatigued. The flight was progressing very well until they hit severe turbulence. At this time they lost control of the aircraft with Dick Oder hanging on to the inside of Davis' armored seat since he was unrestrained. Just before impact, Oder saw the ground and became instantly calm and he thought, "Good it's almost over". They had gotten inverted and Mears was trying to correct the steep bank just prior to them impacting in a rice paddy. At one point one of the pilots, Mr. Mears, Oder believes, said, "Jesus, we're dead; we're dead!" Oder had a dumb thought, "Now that's the LAST thing I want to hear from the pilots!" Oder agreed with him though; he thought that they had bought it. He had never been more scared, before than time or since. ⁵⁶

They hit tail first, left side with a full load of fuel minus the twenty minutes of flying time. The tail boom snapped off and they rolled left, ending upside down with the transmission pushed forward through the cabin roof. The rotor system had disintegrated. Dick Oder wound up on his back on the cabin roof. He eventually realized that he was somehow still alive and was enjoying the moment when he smelled fuel and thought "Fire". He doesn't remember how he exited the aircraft but found that his right arm was dangling and in a lot of pain. Dick came to front of the aircraft and met Mears who looked like he had seen a ghost when he saw Oder. Mears who had suffered a back injury

thought that Dick had been ejected on the way down. Robertson was out but Davis was trapped in his seat. The forward cabin above his head had collapsed and the back of his armored seat was supporting that part of the aircraft. Davis' chin was pushed down into his chest and he couldn't move and was only able to take a quarter of normal breath. There was fuel or transmission fluid started to form a pool around the top of Davis' helmet. The stains on the helmet later confirmed it. They eventually got Davis out with Robertson doing most of the work since Mears and Oder were injured. It took nearly ten minutes to get Davis out to the aircraft. After he was out, Davis realized that Captain Nelson had saved his life because had he been wearing his "chicken plate" it would have crushed his larynx and probably killed him.

Once the crew was outside the aircraft, they turned their attention to defending themselves. They were alone and very vulnerable. They had in effect gone from being the hunters to being the hunted. They hadn't any idea on how long they would be on the ground or if they would be found. They were sure that every enemy soldier within miles had to know about where they were. Oder went back into the Huey and retrieved his M-16 rifle. He was also very concerned about the possibility of encountering a poisonous snake.⁵⁶

They hadn't been on the ground much more than a half hour when they heard the unmistakable sound of an OH-6A. The Hughes OH-6A was a light observation helicopter with a two-man crew, which had been on standby at Camp Evans. The Ground Control Approach (GCA) at Camp Evans had scrambled the Loach to look for the downed aircraft. A "Firefly" loach from Camp Evans was vectored out to where they crashed and began rescue operations. The GCA vectored the Loach near the crash site and then the Loach came directly to the crash site. Somehow the Huey's landing light was shining into the night sky. The landing light switch had apparently been triggered during the crash sequence. This made it very easy for the Loach crew to find Mears and his crew.

The Loach landed and the gunner came running over to the crash site to assess the situation. When he saw that everyone was alive, he turned and signaled the pilot with a thumb up. The pilot was unable to make radio contact while on the ground so he had to go up to a fifty feet altitude to notify Camp Evans that there were survivors. He landed again and Oder and Mears were loaded on the Loach. They were flown to "Charlie Med" at Camp Evans, unloaded and the Loach returned to the crash site to retrieve the other two crewmembers, Davis and Robertson.

It would take Dick Oder until March 2002 to learn who was his savior that night. Dick talked to a former Lancer (B/158) pilot at the Ohio River Chapter of the Viet Nam Helicopter Pilots Association and learned that Paul Cotter was the pilot who had rescued the Phoenix crew that night.

Dick Oder was eventually med-evaced from Viet Nam to Guam where a US Navy doctor operated on his shattered right elbow. After receiving seven months of treatment at Valley Forge Army Hospital, Dick earned a medical disability retirement from the US Army.

They were all thankful to be alive but unfortunately PFC John Robertson would be killed in eleven days as a member of CW2 Paul Stewart's crew during Lam Son 719.

On January 25, 1971 the prelude to the largest airborne invasion since June 6, 1944 started with Operation Dewey Canyon II. Dewey Canyon II would pave the way for Lam Son 719. The plan was for the ARVNs to cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. What the aircrews didn't know was that they were flying into a trap. President Thieu of South Vietnam decided to send the best units into Laos-Airborne Division, Marine Division, first ARVN Division, and many ARVN ranger battalions. Huynh Van Troung was the national security advisor for Thieu. But he was also a top spy for the North Vietnamese and had informed the NVA about the invasion. He was arrested after the failed invasion.⁸⁴ The North Vietnamese had placed many anti-aircraft batteries in the area. The North Vietnamese forces consisted of 60,000 troops including five infantry divisions, two separate infantry regiments, eight artillery regiments, three engineer regiments, three tank battalions, six anti-aircraft regiments and other support troops.³⁸ The first phase required that QL9, the single lane road from Quang Tri to Laos be usable for military traffic. Huey crews assaulting security troops onto Khe Sanh were pleasantly surprised to find a "Welcome to Khe Sanh" sign awaiting them. It was from the Phoenix, C Company, 158th Aviation Battalion, 101st Airborne Division. WO John Michaelson and his crew had placed it there the night before.¹⁰

On February 8, 1971 the aerial assault began and the Phoenix lost another crew consisting of CW2 Paul C. Stewart, the aircraft commander, WO1 Thomas P. Doody, pilot, Specialist 4 Charles G. Bobo, crew chief, and PFC John E. Robertson, door gunner. The MIA synopsis reports: The helicopter was operating about ten 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 (probably 12.7mm machine gun), and that he was returning to the Pickup Zone (PZ), which was about five miles inside South Viet Nam. While the aircraft was in route, Stewart radioed that he was 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. Tom Marshal's book, "The Price of Exit" gives an excellent account of Stewart's actions. It could not be determined whether he burned in the crash or was thrown clear of the aircraft as it impacted. They were in aircraft 68-16307 and the crash site is XD582368. The Phoenix and other aviation units continued the air assaults. With the next three days of combat assaults, twelve Phoenix birds out of twenty took major hits.¹⁰ Stewart had extended his tour and was known as "Mr. Invincible". The Phoenix had become callused to carry on and in spite of all of the banter they knew they could rely on each other.³⁰

Don Davis recalls this about Paul Stewart:

Actually Pat, the story is somewhat more distressing than that. After arriving in the Phoenix I had to wait a few days to take my in country check ride because Paul was the only IP in the unit at the time and he was still on his "30 day extension leave." When Paul extended it was the program that would allow him to ETS from the service after he served the 6 month extension. Then while he was on leave the army changed the policy to the one of allowing all WOs to ETS after serving one year in RVN. When Paul gave me the checkride we also flew down to Personnel at Camp Eagle. He wanted to find out how the change in policy would affect him. He was told that all he had to do was serve an additional 30 days in country to make up for the leave and then he could go home and ETS. That checkride was on about Jan 20. As a side note, when we were doing stuck pedal emergency landings I asked Paul what to do if the T/R just stopped spinning like if the driveshaft got severed. His first answer was said in jest and is not reprintable here in a public forum. We then had a lengthy discussion about it and decided that the best bet would be to make some slow passes both ways over an active an see if the winds would give you a situation you preferred, which if I remember correctly would have been a stuck right pedal. 136

The 158th Aviation Battalion flew around the clock to keep the ARVN 39th Ranger battalion supplied and evacuate casualties. One day Bruce Updyke was involved in a resupply mission where a lone ARVN soldier directed Updyke's bird where to land. The crew chief and door gunner kicked out the supplies and after a turn, about three seconds later an artillery round hit the landing zone exactly where the soldier was standing, disintegrating the ARVN soldier. Updyke's aircraft rocked from the concussion. The next aircraft piloted by Butch Doan was pelted with shrapnel. Back at Khe Sanh, Updyke and others ran up to Doan's aircraft to check on his crew. Doan was okay but laughed that the only thing left of the ARVN soldier was a hunk of meat the size of a ham. The Plexiglas of Doan's Huey was riddled with shrapnel and flecked with bits of flesh, bone and hair. Guys were nervously laughing, picking off pieces of meat and pretending to flip them on each other. Updyke knew that you needed a morbid sense of humor to steel yourself against the daily horrors of war but he felt his buddies wouldn't have acted that way if it had been an American who had been killed. 30

On February 18th, a medevac crew from the 237th Medical Detachment was shot down at Landing Zone, Ranger North. All of the crew was evacuated except SP5 Fujii who made the decision to stay at Ranger North because of the heavy enemy fire. Fujii found a PRC-25 radio and began direct gunships and Air Force Tactical strikes. The Phoenix and Ghost Rider (Company A) ships were sent to resupply Ranger North. On February 20th ten Phoenix Hueys were sent to resupply and emergency extraction of Ranger North. With considerable difficulty Major Jim Lloyd and CPT David Nelson landed on the landing zone. By the time Fujii got into their aircraft, it was on fire. They nursed it four kilometers and crashed on Ranger South. Two Phoenix aircraft landed on Ranger South and got everyone out except Fujii who volunteered to try to help the South Vietnamese unit defend its landing zone.¹² Butch Doan headed toward the flaming wreck and came out of the Landing zone with several hits but was able to rescue Major Lloyd and the crew chief and

the door gunner. Another slick flew in and rescued Captain Nelson but SP5 Dennis Fuji volunteered to stay and assist the South Vietnamese in the defense of Ranger South. Fuji was a hero to all of the aviators. Nelson was a quiet man who loved the spit and polish and as they left the landing zone taking hits, Nelson grimaced as he pointed to a scratch across the toe of his boot.

Major Lloyd, Captain Nelson, WO Doan and three other Huey pilots involved in the aborted rescue earned Silver Star awards while six crew chiefs and door gunners earned Distinguished Flying Crosses. These were the first medals awarded to US troops in the Laotian operation.³⁰

Pat McKeany remembers the incident:

In early 1971 I was involved in an operation called Lamson 719, which was the largest airmobile operation of the Vietnam War into Laos from South Vietnam. Because of the politics at the time, we provided air support to the South Vietnamese Army only. No American troops were to be on the ground during this operation. As we entered Laos, the enemy was ready for us and were well armed.

On February 18, 1971 a helicopter was shot down onto a landing zone (LZ) named "Ranger North", resulting in an American helicopter crew member being stranded. Two days later an operation was conducted to rescue the stranded soldier by the Phoenix (my company). Captain Nelson, of the Phoenix, successfully landed and rescued the stranded soldier. While taking off from the landing zone he encountered heavy enemy fire. He recalled, after the operation, that he saw muzzle flashes on the entire hillside he faced while exiting Ranger North. His helicopter burst in flames. Fortunately, he was able to make an emergency landing onto another hilltop landing zone nearby, called Ranger South. Ranger South was surrounded by the enemy as well.

I was flying with Butch Doan, that day, on a separate operation nearby. We heard an emergency radio call from Captain Nelson and immediately flew to the LZ to attempt a rescue. Now there were five Americans on the ground.

Butch and I decided on a high altitude approach and performed a cork screw approach while circling down to the LZ. We took heavy fire. A small arms round hit between Butch and I, hitting the helicopter's console. We took other small arms fire hits as well. When we landed in the LZ the helicopter that made the emergency landing was engulfed in flames. The M60 machine gun ammunition that was on board the burning helicopter was "cooking off" making it look like a fireworks display. The combination of enemy fire and bullets cooking off from the burning helicopter made for an interesting experience.

A few of the stranded crew members ran across the LZ and jumped onto our helicopter. Due to heavy enemy fire and the rounds cooking off from the burning helicopter, we had to take off from the LZ. As we took off from the LZ we were hit by a 50 Caliber round in the helicopter's mast head. The helicopter started to shake violently and we were able to fly to a nearby secure LZ to be rescued. One of my Facebook buddies, Don Davis, was one of the pilots that was able to rescue the balance of the crew members on Ranger South. Amazingly, everyone made it out alive and there were no American casualties that day.

Unfortunately, Captain Nelson died, a few days later, in a separate operation on March 5th. I'm proud to say that I was among 6 pilots awarded with the Silver Star that day. All other crew members received Distinguished Flying crosses for their contribution in the operation. 120

On February 28th the Phoenix were supporting operations around LZ RANGER SOUTH when Dave Nelson and his crew were shot down. Don Davis and his crew would rescue Nelson and his crew but it required the extreme brave assistance from Skip Butler of D/158 in his AH-1G. Skip had expended all of his ordnance on a 51-caliber machine gun position that had shot down Nelson and was giving 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 any ordnance. The NVA were so distracted by Skip's attacking Cobra that they forgot about Don Davis' UH-1H long enough for him to pick up their downed comrades.

Lam Son 719 would claim the lives of another Phoenix crew. On March 5, 1971, the Phoenix would lose one of its best platoon leaders. Captain David Nelson was a second tour Sky Crane pilot and should have been stationed in DaNang with the 478th Aviation Company. He had survived being shot down on February 20th with Major James Lloyd, the Phoenix Company Commander. On March 5, 1971 he was the aircraft commander of UH-1 # 67-17341 with Warrant Officer Ralph Moreira, pilot; Specialist 4 Joel Hartley, crew chief; and Specialist 4 Michael E. King door gunner. Nelson was an experienced flight leader and on this date was the flight leads of ten aircraft inbound for LZ Sophia. The MIA synopsis reports: The UH-1H was in a flight of ten on a Combat Assault 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. ¹² Tom Marshall says it best in his book: "The loss of Dave Nelson, the most competent, the most capable pilot, shook the men of the Phoenix. From that point forward, the Phoenix pilots understood how little control they had over their individual fates. Nelson's loss hit them hard, very, very hard." ¹⁰ In late 1989 the remains of Nelson and his crew were found. The process of identification would take a year. On October 5, 1990 they were buried at Arlington National Cemetery in a common casket. Nine Phoenix aviators attended the funeral.

Pat McKeany remembers the shoot down of Captain Nelson's crew:

As many of you know I was a Vietnam Helicopter pilot for the 101st Airborne. In early 1971 we were involved in the largest airmobile operation of the Vietnam War, Lam Son

719. Simply put, this was an operation to cut the supply lines of the Ho Chi Minh Trail inside Laos.

I thought I would share the story of one flight during that operation in honor of Captain David Nelson and his Huey crew. On March 5, 1971 Captain Nelson was our flight lead for a 10 aircraft insertion of troops into Landing Zone Sophia inside Laos. Our 10 aircraft followed a few other companies that were inserting troops in front of us. The aircraft in charge of the operation lost control of the move, causing many aircraft to go off the intended course. The result was devastating since aircraft were flying over an area that was not prepped or secure. Out of the 60 aircraft in the operation only 23 remained that weren't shot down or severely damaged by gunfire.

I was Pilot in Command and flying with Captain Don Davis on that insertion. Fortunately, I made a quick decision not to follow all of the other aircraft by flying on the same flight path. We broke off and flew to the original flight path. That was one of the best decisions I ever made since we didn't take any fire. We were one of the 23 aircraft that were able to continue flying and returned to the same landing zone three more times that day. Lucky us!

Captain Nelson and his crew were not so lucky. He radioed that his aircraft had been hit in the fuel cell and that his door gunner had been wounded in the head. He said that he was going to attempt to return to return to Khe Sanh (our base of operations). When Don and I were coming out of the landing zone there was much confusion, as so many helicopters had been shot down or damaged. As we gained altitude, I saw a helicopter explode in midair to our left. I was convinced it was Captain Nelson's aircraft. No ground search could be done at the time since there were so many enemy troops and anti-aircraft fire. The bodies of Captain Nelson and his crew were not recovered until 1989. And, it took another year to identify them.

Captain Nelson, Warrant Officer pilot Ralph Moreira, crew chief Joel Hartley and door gunner Michael King died that day. The loss of Captain Nelson hit me, and my fellow pilots, especially hard. We had the utmost respect for him and would have followed him into battle anytime and anywhere. He was a true leader and commanded respect. I truly miss him and wish he and his crew could be with their families enjoying a wonderful holiday. 117

The US Army's price for Lam Son 719 was the lost of 107 helicopters and damage to at least 544 aircraft. ³⁸ The Phoenix had survived Lam Son 719. They went back to supporting the 3rd Brigade of the 101st and continued flying CCN missions. In July 1971 they supported Lam Son 720 and in September, they flew in Lam Son 810. ¹³ The Phoenix were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism against a hostile force during Lam Son 719. ⁷⁶

But fate was not finished with the Phoenix. On May 17, 1971 a call was made by the Redskins for any available slicks to assist in a Prairie Fire (hot extraction). Warrant Officer David P. Soyland and his co-pilot, Warrant Officer Dale Pearce responded. Ted Olsen

remembers that afternoon: Phoenix were flying general support that day. It was after LS 719, and we were all out on pretty much A&T (Ash & Trash) single-ship missions doing routine resupply and whatever.

I was the first Phoenix ship done for the day, with no more missions.

It was sort of mid-late afternoon. We topped off at POL, then repositioned to the Nest and shut down in our revetment.

We all walked up to the hangar, and I went up to Ops to file our daily report.

While I was upstairs, the Prairie Fire call came in.

As always there was no hesitation, and I said we'd take it -- no one else was available.

I got my crew together and we all started hustling back down to the flight line -- the CC (Drinkwater I think) and DG hauling their M60s and ammo cans.

It was around that time that Soyland came flying into the Nest. As I recall he was also just done for the day, and he was returning to shut down.

But the word of the Prairie Fire was already out...

I was back up on the radios, down at our ship and getting ready to crank, and I heard Ops tell Soyland that 65 (me) was going to take the call.

I then heard Soyland say -- as he hovered into the Nest -- that "was BS, it was 1st Platoon's turn to respond to Prairie Fires" ... and besides, he was already up and running.

He wasn't taking no for an answer, and in a moment he was away and gone.

We hadn't even cranked.

I've often wondered if we should have continued to crank, and then followed along at maybe 5-10 minutes behind?

Could we have helped, or made a difference?

No way to know.

The initial call seemed to be that only a single ship was needed, so when Soyland took over I aborted and we all returned back up to the hangar.

We never saw him again... ¹²⁸

As the aircraft, UH-1H, #67-17607 was in the Landing zone, it was taking heavy anti-aircraft fire. The door gunner, Special 4 Gary Allcorn reported later that WO Pearce's hands jerked upward to the sky as if he was hit. As the aircraft crashed, Allcorn was ejected. Allcorn was picked up by a Brigade LOH and it was hit in the tailboom and Allcorn was thrown out of the aircraft and was unconscious until the next afternoon and was later rescued by Special Forces team as well as the crew chief, Specialist 5 Skip Parker. Parker remembers that when he regained consciousness, he covered with tree branches to hide him from the North Vietnamese. The Special Forces team leader named Yates arrived at the crash site and yelled to see if anyone was alive. Skip Parker was taken to 18th Surgical Hospital at Quang Tri. After three days there, Skip was sent to the Fort Devens Hospital ¹³² The body of Dale Pearce was unable to be extracted from the wreckage. Allcorn reported that he saw a figure with a white T-shirt running down a ridgeline with the NVA firing at the individual. Special Forces surmised that Soyland attempted an escape and was killed by the NVA. ¹⁰ His body has never been recovered. There are seven different NVA witnesses with different stories concerning Soyland's actions. ²⁹ The Special Forces team leader was Lt. Danny Entrican who was wounded after a firefight. Their callsign was "Alaska" Ironically Entrican's and Soyland's identification tags ended up on display in Hanoi.

On July 6, 1971 the Phoenix got a preview of the upcoming monsoon season when Typhoon Harriet came ashore bringing 60 mile per hour winds and 12.75 inches of rain. Damage was minor due extensive storm preparation. ⁶²

In late 1971, the 158th Aviation Battalion flying through torrential rains, low ceilings and bad visibility evacuated over 1000 Vietnamese refugees and then donated money, time, and efforts to provide food, clothing and shelter fro them. ⁴² This was Typhoon Hester. The Phoenix hanger was damaged by Typhoon Hester on October 23, 1971. First Lieutenant Chuck Persyn (Phoenix 44) and WO1 Paul Cunningham and Jim Leonard spent the entire day in near zero visibility being directed from one rescue to another. Cunningham was the instrument flight specialist for the unit. Persyn and Cunningham received the Soldier's Medal for their efforts.

Charles King reports that the Phoenix aircraft in December, 1971 were flown to Vung Tau and turned in. Prior to being stood down, VNAF aircraft commanders and crewchiefs flew with the Phoenix so the VNAF crews would be familiar with the area of operations. They had to steam clean the aircraft prior to turning them over to the VNAF. The crews flew back to Evans in Chinook helicopter. While flying back a bullet entered the Chinook helicopter about six inches from Jim Leonard while they were flying over Chu Lai. ⁹⁹

On December 12, 1971 the Vietnam chapter of the Phoenix closed.

On December 31, 1971 Specialist 4 Robert Denmark had the unfortunate honor of being the last enlisted member of Charlie Company to lose his life in Viet Nam. He and Charles King were transferred to D Troop, 3rd/5th Cavalry Squadron. King was the last person in the Phoenix when the company stood down. ³² The last officer killed was 1LT Byron K. Kulland who had served with the Phoenix and then was transferred to F Troop, 8th Cavalry when the 101st Division left Viet Nam. He was shot down looking for Air Force pilot, LTC Iceal Hambleton, call sign Bat 21 near Dong Ha. Hambleton was an expert on missile weaponry and it was important to find him before the North Vietnamese did. There was the possibility that the North Vietnamese would turn Hambleton over to the Soviets if he was captured. Kulland's remains was returned to US soil on April 29, 1994. ^{19, 5}

2. Flight & Operational Aspects

Flying in I Corps was a demanding and unforgiving area of operations. Of the four Corps areas, I Corps had long been considered the most critical and dangerous area of Viet Nam. ⁸⁶ Changing weather, low hanging clouds, lack of navigational aids required that pilots be familiar with every square mile of the flying area. The Ashau Valley because of its location and topography made it subject to the northeast and southeast monsoons with their heavy rain and hail. ⁸⁷ Most of the landing zones would only allow one ship to land at a time through triple canopy jungle. It was usually a vertical descent and ascent. Sometimes you would have to land to a hover and have the troops jump onto the ground. This type of flying demanded the closest crew coordination as well as excellent pilot technique. Whichever pilot was on the controls, the other pilot would monitor the engine instruments, radio calls, watch for obstacles and the enemy, and coordinate with the rest of the flight and gun ships. The crew chief and door gunner would tell the pilot that he was clear of obstacles as well as fire their weapons if needed and watch for enemy activity and try to keep the troops informed as what the situation was. The pilot on the controls only listened to the crew; he had to have total concentration on getting the aircraft on the ground. The rest of the aircraft in the flight would space themselves to allow the aircraft in front enough time to go in and land and unload the troops and the take-off. Doing "S" turns or orbiting over the LZ or returning to the pickup zone to get the next load would accomplish this. Flight lead would announce to the rest of the flight what kinds of

conditions the landing zone was in as he ascended. Then you would go get the next sortie. Also the Cobras would be making their maneuvers, trying to protect everyone in the flight.

Ken Mayberry in the book, "Remembering Firebase Ripcord" stated flying in our area this way: "The area we were in was very mountainous. The terrain went from the ocean to the coastal flatlands-sand dunes, swamp, rice paddies-to rolling hills, the Annamite Range, which grew abruptly with a ridgeline running north to south as far as the eye could see. Camp Evans was adjacent to QL-1, which was the only highway in Vietnam which ran north to south along the coast. We had sand dunes and the sea on one side of us and rolling hills and mountains on the other. It was a miniature Rocky Mountain-type of environment. We went from basically sea level to 2,000 to 3,000 feet in altitude. That may not seem like much to you but for helicopters it pushed them to the limit. Hovering at 2,000 feet was like 10,000 –plus feet depending on the density altitude and temperature stressing our engines and rotor systems. It was not unusual to bleed RPM at those altitudes depending on how much weight we were carrying on board. Add that to wind shear in the mountainous environment and it made for some challenging piloting. " 137

In 1969 you were issued a .38 caliber pistol with six rounds, a chest protector also known as a "chicken plate". The pilots usually took out the back plate so we would have more plates for every crewmember. Plus the armored seat protected the pilots. The chest protector was made from ceramic material and could be effective against small arms hits. One of the crew chiefs was hit in the chest by an AK-47 round. The chest protector did its job since the only damage to the crew chief was a bruise on his chest. The chest protector had a hole with the spent round in it. Most of the pilots procured an extra weapon such as a M-16 and extra ammunition. If you were shot down the extra armament could mean the difference between life and death. During the fall of 1969, we were issued pin gun flares. The US Air Force had survival radios but the Army didn't. Bob Andrews of the Redskins had a survival radio that he had obtained from an Air Force unit but left it on his bunk when he went to fly a mission. Bob crash landed in Laos wishing he had the radio. He made his way back to the Ashau Valley several days later where he was picked up by a pink team from B/ 2nd/17th Cavalry. The body of his co-pilot (Watkins) hasn't been recovered.

Sometimes the crews had to educate the ground force on how to use aircraft and aircraft procedures. One day CWO John Eaton and 1LT Gary Earls had a mission to pick up a battalion commander at a site south of Camp Eagle. The Colonel came out and sat down in the seat and the crewchief, Joe Woods, motioned for the Colonel to roll down his shirtsleeves. The Battalion Commander refused. Joe calmly said, "Mr. Eaton, the Colonel refuses to roll down his sleeves". John turned to the officer and said, "Sir, roll down your sleeves". The colonel mumbled something about flying a lot without rolling down his sleeves. John, said, "Sir, I've been flying for a couple of years, and I still roll down my sleeves". The colonel looked at Earls for moral support. LT. Earls said, "Sir, Mr. Eaton, is the aircraft commander and under AR 95-1 he is responsible for the safe operation of this aircraft and is the final authority on whether it leaves the ground or not". Earls wasn't sure if AR 95-1 stated that but it made for a good bluff. The colonel rolled down his sleeves. He

wasn't happy about the situation and just didn't want to mess up his uniform. ⁴ Most passengers complied with our requests to roll down their sleeves but occasionally you would find an individual who would require additional education on why it was important to roll down their sleeves.

The best ground unit to work with in 1969 was 3/187th Infantry Battalion. The S3 Air had come to the Phoenix pilots in the spring and asked them about aviation operations. He got a class on loads and weight and balance of the aircraft so when we did logistical missions for them, the first load was light and as your fuel load decreased, the amount that you had to carry increased. We could more for them in less time than the other two battalions in the Third Brigade.

The enemy used deception to trick flight crews into ambushes. One incident involved a fake Mayday call using Phoenix call sign. All of the Phoenix aircraft were accounted by checking the "Phoenix Nest" and all of the aircraft that were flying. ⁹⁴

As flight lead the job could be easy or hard depending on many factors. You were given the grid coordinates of the landing zone. You talked to the ground unit commander on the FM frequency and to your flight on the VHF frequency and to the gun ships on the UHF frequency. You had to be aware on artillery targets in the area and locations of the gun to target line. You didn't want to meet artillery rounds while in flight. Usually there had been an artillery preparation and many times the aerial rocket artillery (ARA) Cobras would circle the landing zone area. Fortunately there was an excellent working relationship between the Redskins and the Griffins (C/4/77). ARA lead would coordinate with Redskin lead on which part of the LZ to cover. The ARA would work the perimeter on the LZ and the Redskins would work the interior in case the LZ was booby-trapped. Or they would rotate depending on which ordnance was available. The ARA would make several runs to expend all of their rockets so the maximum amount firepower would be used on the landing zone. You wanted to destroy as much of the enemy as possible. As flight lead you had the responsibility to report to the rest of the flight if the LZ was "hot" or "cold". And what condition the LZ was in and what obstacles were there. You had to keep track of the number of sorties and passengers and insure the successful completion of the assault.

3. Origin of the Phoenix

Skip Lee remembers that Warrant Officer James Wilkerson suggested the callsign of "Phoenix" during an officer's call held in company headquarters. According to Greek and later Egyptian mythology the Phoenix lives one thousand years and is consumed by fire and then lives another one thousand years. Wilkerson was infused out of the unit after the Phoenix arrived in country. ⁹³

The original drawing is in the possession of Gary Elliott. A Sergeant Murphy, who was the communication sergeant around March or April 1969, drew it. He used a C-ration case divider as his drawing pad. The drawing was sent to a firm in California for the original patches. Later the local Vietnamese tailor shop made the patches. Some of the senior enlisted staff chose Phoenix because they believed the Vietnamese were superstitious and they felt the mythical Phoenix would strike fear in their hearts. There is a story that the Phoenix would fly over a united Viet Nam. John Eaton, one of the original members distinctly remembers that the name, "Phoenix" stemmed from a Vietnamese legend that when the Phoenix flew over Viet Nam that Viet Nam would become united again. ¹ It was Gary Elliott who also came up with the idea of business cards for the Phoenix pilots. The business cards became a novelty among the ground troops who would occasionally ask for one of the cards. At one time there was a Phoenix bird painted on the nose of each aircraft. It became a good luck charm for us. The Commanding General of the 101st ordered all nose art removed when the Kingsmen of B/101 went overboard on their design. Gary Elliott plans to give the drawing to the 160th Aviation Regiment since the core of the 160th pilots came from C/158. One of the lessons learned from the failed mission, "Desert One" was the need for special operations aviation. The Army instructed the 101st to determine the mission requirements under a program called "Project Honey Badger" ¹¹⁶ Hildegard (Hilly) Wyne-Smith who had been a pilot in C/158 at Fort Campbell told Gary Earls in 1990 that the Phoenix pilots had become the 101st Division experts at the use of night vision goggles. When the 160th Aviation (then Battalion and later Regiment) was formed they needed those pilots with that special set of qualifications. The 160th was originally called Task Force 158 and later Task Force 160. The 160th is the Special Operation Aviation Regiment for the United States Army. ⁷⁷

Also in August, 1969, CPT. Monty Davis, the executive officer asked Warrant Officer Steve Bookout to make a stencil of a yellow Phoenix bird to go on the aircraft bellies. Bookout had difficulties locating cardboard big enough to use as a stencil but he did. The Phoenix insignia on the aircraft lasted about a month before it was ordered to be removed. It was to be used as a psychological method against the North Vietnamese. ¹²⁵

Additionally Company "A" 5th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment uses the call sign, "Phoenix" and continues the "Phoenix" tradition. Additionally the Third Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment stationed in Germany traces its origins back to the original Charlie Company. ⁷⁵

4. The Unsung Heroes

The following are those men who did their jobs day in and day out with little or no recognition. They were cooks, mechanics, clerks and all other job specialists who kept an aviation company combat ready. One of their additional duties was to be perimeter guards at night after working their regular day shift that could be longer than the traditional eight hours. They worked in primitive conditions such as hot, dusty, and humid during the summer and wet and cold during the winter. Their basic living environment consisted of a plywood sided building with a tin roof with wire screens for windows for ventilation and

without indoor plumbing. There was a community shower and toilet. It wasn't an easy living or working environment. Additionally there was always a possibility of a rocket attack or sniper attack.

There were also hazards for flight crews like PFC James S. Forleo was burned by metal particles from a flare on May 28, 1969. He was taken to 18th Surgical Hospital and then on to the USS Repose for further treatment.

These men came from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Our door gunners were from infantry units and had volunteered to become door gunners. It wasn't any easy task to help guide the pilots down into a landing zone while firing a machine gun and watching any passengers or cargo on board. As John Eaton wrote in an e-mail about his crew, "Good aircraft maintenance did not happen by accident. It happened because someone worked hard and checked and rechecked this very complicated machine and did not let up. You were just as dead if you crashed in a ball of fire because of less than optimal aircraft maintenance as you were, crashing into a ball of fire because of the enemy" ⁸⁰ Chuck Eckenrouth was trained as a tank turret mechanic and while at Fort Meade, Maryland answered a request for someone with a background in electronics, weapon systems, hydraulics to work on different gun ships. ⁶³ Jim Lutz was a combat qualified infantryman who volunteered to be a door gunner. But when the first Sergeant found out that he had some college and could type, Jim became our company clerk. He was probably one of a very few combat infantryman badge (CIB) company clerks in the 101st. ⁶⁴

E-8

Bethany, Willie J.; Dickey, Ira L.; Gragg, Clifford
Padgett, John E. Jr. *

E-7

Boyer, Robert T. *; Buller, ?; Fields, Aaron; Haymore, Joseph ; Mech ? ; Mullaney, ?
Parsons, James;
Pressley, David L. *;

E-6

Bekkum, ?; Brogan, John *; Brown, Charles L.; Brown, ?; Busch, Eric P.;
Campbell, Kenneth L. *; Clark, Robert; Connell, Dwane
Couch, James R. (Pappy) *; Crutcher, ?; Decker, ?; Dixon, ; Enale, Leroy;

Flint, Ronald J. *; Honnell, ?; Lowe, ?; Luker, Terry J.; Mahaney, Leroy S.; McCabe,
Thomas D.; McGuire, Billie E. *;
Owens, Sherrill D. *; Palmer, Thomas
Pinkston, Willie J. *; Ringler, Terry; Steveson, Robert F.;
Tindal, Samuel C. *; Webb, ?; Zahn, John L.

E-5

Ackerman, John; Anderson, Stephen; Beaver, James W.; Blackwell, Willie B.; Boardman, Dana P. *; Bobo, Charles; Boska, Gregory; Boykin, Glen; Bristol, Harry C.; Brown, Charles L.*; Brown, Frederick A.; Brown, Rocky J.; Burke, ? ; Campbell, Daniel L.; -- Carlton, Rick; Clark, Robert; Cook, Virgil H. ;Cornelius, Larry; , Culberston David; Daily, David ; Danley, Lunsford; ; Devins, John W.; Dodge, ? ; Dotson, William; Drake, Lee A.; Drinkwater, David; Dufrene, S.; Duncan, ?; Durand, David, Easterling, ?; Eckenroth, Charles S. *; Eury, Tony; Forleo, ?; Felts, Daniel; Fitzgerald, Brian ;Frazier, Larry; Goodger , Douglas A.; Goodin, Rick Garich, George C.; Hammele, Allan; Hart, Russ ; Hart, Ralph L.; Hartwig, Richard; Garcia, ?; Gomes, Abe; Grant, Moses L.; Gray, Carlton C.; Hansen, Ed ; Hastings, William D. *; Hart, Ralph Heinis, Ronald G. ; Hedgepath, Roy J.; Hurley, William; Irwin, ?; Ison, William C.; Jenkins, Thomas M.; Jewell, Dick; Jones, ?; Kemmerling, Pat; Kruckenberg, ? ; Kemmer, ?; Kenck, D.; Kindred, Kenneth B.; King, Charles; Kinne, Allen G.; Lawson, ?; Lent, ? ; Leonard, James; Lewis, Rodney; Marek, Ronald D.; Martin, Art; Matthews, Hugh D.; McCabe, Thomas D. ; McCrory, Joseph Paul; McDonald, Ronnie; Metcalf, ?; Middaugh, Ronald D. ; Moore, Larry D.; Murphy, Thomas M.; Oder, Richard Palmer, Thomas J. *; Parker, Harold E. (Skip); Rahl, ? Ryan, ? ; Sears, ?; Smith, Charles; Sneed, James B.; Stege, Bradley, C.; Ullman, Ronald *; Waters, Joel D. ; Woods, Joseph D.; Van Tassel, Lanny; Wiggins, Larry J.; Wolfenbarger, Steve; Wright, Dan

E-4

Andrews, Edmund P. *; Allcorn, Gary; Amos, Mike, (Walter); Anderson, Ronald B.; Anderson, ?; Arnett, Mahlon R. Aspholm, ? ; Atherton, Steven; Barnes, ?; Bartels, Terry R. *; Barber, Steven J.; Becka, Charles D.; Becker, Edward L.; Bench, David L. *; Barcia, ?; Barnes, ?; Besarab, Ludwik; Bibbons, Johnny J.; Blair, Charles; Blair, Richard H.; Bloomquist, Richard; Bobo, Charles G.; Bowser, Clarence M.; Bradley, Alfred S. *; Brannan, James Bristol, Harry C. *; Brittman, Stuart; Brooks, David L.; Brown, Kenneth; Brown, Rocky J.; Burch, James H.; Buss, Jeffrey A. * Bylsma, Douglas N. *; Cantrell, Richard; Carlton, Rick; Carman, ?; Carolina, James L. *; Carnline, David; Carman, ?; Ciommo, ?; Cassalia, David L.; Chamberlain, Clayton; Clarmin, ?; Coulston ; Childress, Harold *; Clarman, ?; Coln, Robert; Connell, Duane; Crawford, George; Cruz, Jouguin S. ; Culpepper, Michael ; Daniel, Roosevelt; ?; DeLaTorre. George ;Denmark, Robert L.; Dennie, ?; Devins, John W. ; Deyo, Michael F. *; Dittmar, Robert; Dobbins, William T.; Dodge, ?; Doncaster, ?; Drake, Lee A.; Duvall, ?; Dotson, William; Espinoza, ?

Dunbar, Doyle D. *; Duncan; Dungan, Timothy; Duvall, ?; Eggleston, David L.; Espinoza, ?; Felts, Dan O.; Fisher, Harold J. *; Fisher, Ralf; Ford, Rick; Fowler, James; Forleo, James S. French, Keith W. * Fitzgerald, Brian; Freese, Richard; Friday, Brenton (Chip) *; Frost, Edwin A.; Garcia, Armando; Garich, George C. *; Gates, Stephen Gilbert, Roger *; Goodin, Rick C.; Gomes, Abel L.; Gonzales, Rouhaliod; Goodger, Douglas A *; Gray, Carlton; Green, Marvin L.; Greenbank, Richard; Grintals, Guntis; Hall, Charles; Halley, Dennis; Hamake, Alan; Hanson, Richard A.; Hayes, ?; Harrison, John W. III *; Hartley, Joel C; Hedgpath, Doyle G.; Henderson, David; Henderson, Michael; Hendrickson, Bruce; Hinton, ? ; Hobczuk, Nikolaj; Hoffman, ?; Hooks, ?; Houch, Roger F.; Howard, Evans; Howard, ?; Howe, Robert C.; Hull, Patrick; Hilt, Terry; Inge, ?; Ingram, Corky; Irvin, ? ; Ison, William C. *; Jackson, ?; Johnson, ?; Johnson, ?(2); Jones, Ernest; Jones, ?; Kelling, ? ; Kelly, Russell R.; Kenck, D ; Kensinger, Richard; Kinne, Alan G.; Kingery, Fround L.; King, Michael E.; King, Charles; Kinney, Robert L.; Kinney, Robert L. *; Knapp, Charles H. *; Kock, Gregory D.; Krager, Randy; Kratzke, Erwell; Kruckenber, Arvid *; LaFrinere, Mark S.; Lamb, Douglas W. *; Lamonica, Kenneth; Lang, Daniel K.; Lang, Marcus J. : Langley, Billie J.; Larson, Roger E.; Larson, Roger K *; Lee, Larry, D *; Leonard, James R.; Lewis, James R. ; Lewis, Rodney; Lisle, ?; Loll, David C.; Long, Jerry W. *; Lopes, Richard; Lopez, ?; Lough, Steve; Lowe, Steve; Lutz, James; Lynch, ?; Maguire, ?; Manske, ?; Marck, Michael D.; Marck, Ronald D.; Martin, Arthur; Martinez, Leoncio; Matsch, Michael; Maynard, ?; McCarty, Alan; McQueen, William W.; Merrell, Dennis; Metcalf, Richard; Minobe, Ronald D.; Minor, Ellis ; Montalband, Richard; Moore, Terry ?; Morgan, Ron; Morikawa, James; Morrison, Bruce H.; Mortonsen, Terry; Moss, ?; Murphy, Thomas M. * ; Nakapalau, Louis E.; Nelson ?; Nohl, Allen H.; No __, James A.; Onstad, ? Obert, Gerald L. *; Onstad, ?; Orms, James; Osby, Cleo, Jr.; Pacheco, Juan (John) A.; Pear, ?; Perdue, Grafton; Peters, ?; Phillips, Michael; Pichelman, Thomas L.; Poe, Bruce G.; Powers, John L.; Quitmeyer, Harry; Regner, Matt Reed, John S. *; Richards, ?; Richardson, Donald N. ; Richey, Samuel J.; Rigby, Larry L.; Riswaldt, Stephen T.; Robertson, John; Robertson, Mickey L.; Root, David; Ryan, ?; Russell, Charles W.; Rutledge, Phillip L. ; Sandon, John C.; Schmidt, Milo; Schultz, Daniel M. ; Sebesta, David ; Selvage, ?; Shuck, ?; Sidewalk, ? ; Siegers, Kenneth * ; Slee, Ronald; Smith, John; Smith, Michael; Smith, Steven A.; Spangler, Thomas M.; Spencer, Clarence ; Spowell, ?; Stankowski, ?; Starbuck, William D.; Staton, Levon; Stockley, Dennis R.; Swinehart, Richard A.; Tanner, Mark; Tallent, Roy D.; Test, Everett E.; Thompson, Thomas E. *; Trayer, Randy; Truck, ?; Tucker, Donald L.; Tunaitis, ? Tucker, Donald L. *; Vasquez, Jose; Vasquez, ?; Vebely, Dale T.; Vial, Robert G. "Frenchy"; Vogt, ?; Voll, Richard L.; Vost, Russell; Wach, Edislaw; Wactor, ?; Waddington, Craig; Wade, Ronald P. * ; Wasilk, Wayne E.; Walker, Charles R. *, Walker, ?; Widknan, Douglas N (?);

Wiggins, Larry, J. *; Wilkins, ?; Wisemore, Stephen F.;
Woodruff, Robert L. *; Wornkey, Steven R.; Worrell,Walter J.; Wright, ?
Wunschel, Robert *

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Angell,Steven W.; Anderson,Steven R.; Ashford,David L.; Banks, Timothy *; Bannerman,
Cedric; Barkley, Thomas; Barnes, Theodore;
Beasley, Glenn G. *
Becka, Charles D. *
Bibbins, Johnny J. *
Blair, Richard H. *; Brown, David; Broyles,David L.;
Carmichael, Robert A. *; Carter,Earl S.; Cherants,Harry; Clemons,Clinton W.; Cruz,
J.S.;Cullen,William; Curry,Rand; Davis,Clarence;
Deans, Charles W. *; Deaton, Jerry; Dennie, ?
DeHoog, Ari *; Dorman,Michael G.; Elliott,Daniel;Felts, ?
Fister, Stanley J. *
Foster, Richard S. *; Fowler ,Jim; Foy, James R.; Grimes, George W. :
Harrison, Robert L. *; Hayes, James
Heinis, Ronald G. *; Hellman,Grant;
Herzer,Terry M. *
Holi, Emil C. *; Holmes,Ran D.; Howe,Robert C. ?;
Inman, Charles *; Jackson,Mitchel
Johnson, Ronnie *; Jones,?; Kamm, Jack; Kelly,Russel R.; Kemmer,Dale J.;
Kesheneff, Kenneth G. *;
Kiser, Thomas H. *; Lambert,Lawrence; Landon,Charles R.;
LaPointe, Gilles R. *
Lawson, Donald F. Jr. *; Lee,Stephen G.; Lenceski,Charles;Lopes, Michael A.; Luker,?
Lopes, Michael A. *; Maguire, Arthur; Marrero,Manuel D.; McAllister,Alfred; McCall, ?;
Minor,George L.; Montague, John;
Padgett, Lawrence; Petterson, Ronny; Pierce,Douglas; Reed,Fabrain R. ; Regner,
Matthew H.;Richey, ?; Rival,?; Robertson, John E.; Rodriquez, ?;
Romero, Manuel *; Schule,Daniel A.; Sieh,Douglas S.; Stevens,Roosevelt;
Swint, Benjamin Jr. *; Tallent, ?; Thompson,James; Tomilson,Davis; Trala,John;
Warren,Stephen O.; Wasson,Steven E.; Williams,Anthony; Wolfenbarger, Steve;

*- denotes original members

5. Where we lived

Several years ago there was a discussion between John Eaton and John Kamps about who lived in which hootch.(building). Later on a visit to Atlanta in 1992, John Kamps asked Gary Earls and Gary Sherman, the same question. We could remember some folks but not everyone. In 1998 at the VHPA Reunion in Fort Worth, Jack Glennon gave his answer and filled in a lot of the blanks. Of course, there is a need to have a complete listing as possible. The Navy Seabees originally built the buildings for the US Marines in 1967/1968. These buildings were built out of plywood with screens for windows all around the building and a tin roof and a door on each end of the building. There wasn't any indoor plumbing until we did some plumbing to get running water to the kitchen area. Sandbags were place around the bottom of the walls and on the roof. During the monsoon and winter we covered the screens with plastic with hopes of keeping warm. Usually there were five rooms with a common living room/kitchenette. Each "bedroom" had enough room for a single bed and some storage. Rocket boxes made excellent storage containers. Everyone chipped in to buy a refrigerator and a television. Of course there were only two channels, Armed Forces Viet Nam (AFVN) and a Vietnamese channel. This explains why the club became a necessity. The Armed Forces Viet Nam showed old American TV series. I remember the TV series "Combat" as one of their programs. AFVN radio station played a variety of programming including "polka" on Sunday morning. And they would play the "Grand Ole Opry country music on Saturday evenings. ⁴ The 500-gallon water buffalo was "graciously "donated by a motor pool at Camp Eagle for the officers' shower. ²¹ There was a Holiday Inn towel that hung in one hootch which gave the hootch #26 title, "Holiday Inn". The towel came from Bob Marrs who liberated the towel from the Holiday Inn in San Bernardino, California.⁴⁸

Behind the officers' hootches was the 18th Surgical Hospital until November, 1969 when they were relocated to Quang Tri to support the First Brigade of the 5th Mechanized Division. Someone at 101st Division headquarters decided to move an eight inch Howitzer Battery into the 18th Surgical old area. Periodically at night the battery would fire their weapons. So much for crew rest.

Hootch 22	1969	1970	1971
	Otto Offereins		Ken Mayberry
	Bob Kelly	Butch Doan	
	Jack Ross	Dave Wolfe	
	Ron Nyhan	Larry "Lurch" Miller	
	Ken Montgomery	Clarence Copney	
	Steve Bookout	(?) McCall	
	Jim Leach	(?) Martin	
		Tom Marshall (Nov 24)	
		Tom Doody	
		Dave Rayburn	
		Don Mears	

Hootch 23

Layne Heath	Became RLO
Bill Majors	Ronnie McDonald
Steve Lewis	Chuck Doty
Phil Hickey	
Bruce Farley	
Gary Earls (6/69-1-70)	

Hootch 24 (Commander's)

Major John Jenkins (6 Aug 68-23 July 69)
Major Larry Karjala (24 July 69-30 Nov69)
Major Gerald Lord (1 Dec 69-1 Jun 70)
Major William Longarzo (2 Jun 70-29 Aug 70)
CPT Robert J. Baker(25 Aug70-Jan 71) CPT Carl Hunt
Major James Lloyd
Major William James Head (Aug-Oct71); CPT Jerry A. Lewis
Major Teddy Allen(Oct - Dec71)
CPT Monte Davis CPT Don Fuller
CPT Larry Willette
CW3 Boykin
CPT John Hodges
CPT Jerry Lewis (Last Commander)

Hootch 25

RLO in 1969	Swamp in 1970
Bill Rodgers (?)	Rick Kincaid
Lundquist (?)	Ted Olson
	Dean Grau
	John Michaelson
	Dave Rayburn
	Snyder
	Groover
	Llewelyn

Hootch 26

Holiday Inn in 1969	Country Club in 1970
Bob Scarbrough	Rick Kincaid
Phillipe Las Hermes	Mike Catado
Roy Miller	Dave Rayburn
Bruce Innacone	Dennis Rude

Bill Brown
Don Swanson
Thomas Forsythe
Alan Maness (?)
Don Cornwell
Dennis Rude

Don Cornwell

Hootch 28

Rick Morrow
Frank Metsker
Skip Lee
John Hodnett
Jamie Navarette
John Eaton
Gary Sherman
Terry Mortenson (?)

Tom Marshall (Dec 11)

Hootch 29 (Next to Phoenix Club)

John Kamps
Steve Rotsart
Cliff Poe
Bruce Fairley
Jack Glennon
Neil Livingstone

6. Officers (not previously listed)

Commission: CPT. Ernest V. Adkins; LT. Larry Armstrong; ; CPT. Roger P. Bergstorm;
CPT. John A. Bottman; LT. Aaron Brown; CPT. Donald C. Davis; 1LT Neil C. Doty; LT.
Donald J. Fineran; CPT. Robert L. Floyd III; LT. George L. Graves; CPT. ; Thomas S.
Guyon; CPT. Wert G. Harlan; CPT. William Holmes; CPT. Carl V. Hunt; LT. Gene
Haltennof; LT Bruce Ianacone; LT. Daniel J. Murphy; LT. Charles E. Persyn; CPT.
William Rodgers; CPT. William P. Rosser; CPT. Steve Rotsart; CPT. George W. Spence;
LT. Walter Thompson; LT. G. "Bruce" Updyke; LT. William A. Vivolo, Jr.;

Warrant: WO1 Kirk Alexander; WO1 Jan E. Bailey; WO1 Larry G. Baldwin; WO1 Roger B.
Baxter; WO1 Bruce Bender; WO1 John Beeson; WO1 Steve Bookout; WO1 James
Boeringer; WO1 Michael Bright; WO1 Robert Brooks; WO1 Jeff Bulmer; WO1 Paul Burke;
WO1 Steve Butrym; WO1 Denis Carson; WO1 Michael Cataldo; CW2 Gary A. Cofer;
WO1 Robert A. Coleman; WO1 Clarence F. Copney; WO1 Donald Cornwell; WO1 Dennis

Cripps; WO1 Thomas Cullen; WO1 George Dial; WO1 Jan E. Dailey; WO1 David J. Dean; WO1 Leon Dixon; WO1 Raybert H. "Butch" Doan; WO1 Robert Donnelly; WO1 William A. Eury; WO1 Dan Farris; WO1 Robert Floyd; WO1 George Frederick; WO1 MacDonald Fuller; CW2 Alwyn Rick Gillis; WO1 Gregory ; WO1 Randall C. Goulette ; Mark Groover; WO1 Michael Harding; CW2 Michael Helms; CW2 Richard M. Higgins; WO1 Robert Holcomb; WO1 Kris A. Hunt; WO1 Darrell Keeth; WO1 Richard Kincaid; WO1 Dean R. Knutson; WO1 James M. Laniell; WO1 James D. Leach; WO1 Robert Llewellyn; WO1 Bob Marrs; WO1 John P. McKeany; WO1 Don A. Mears; WO1 Michael Merila; WO1 John O. Michaelson; CW2 Larry D. Miller; WO1 Dannel D. Mills; CW2 Ray Mobley; CW2 Wayne M. Moline; CW2 Gregory B. Moody; WO1 Sean Moore; CW2 Richard Morrow; WO1 Maurice Morton; WO1 Albert J. Ondina; WO1 Dale A. Pearce; WO1 Larry Pluhar; WO1 James Rademacher; WO1 Phillip Rutledge; WO1 Robert Sauer; WO1 Robert Scarbrough; WO1 Gus W. Schrade, Jr. ; WO1 Richard T. Scrugham; WO1 Michael R. Seiffert; WO1 Frederick G. Sherman; WO1 David D. Snyder; WO1 Michael Szardleta; WO1 Jeffrie L. Todd; WO1 Randy Trayer; WO1 Greg Von Eschen; WO1 Kenneth L. Welchel; WO1 Robert White; WO1 Charles Whittenton; WO1 David J. Wolfe; CW2 Edward Zick

7. Aircraft

Phoenix Aircraft			
Aircraft	Aircraft Commander	Crewchief	Door Gunner
64-13736		Charles King	
		Mike Phillips	
66-16517	Art Herndon	Mike Amos	David L. Eggleston
66-16707	Poe, Clifford	Allen G. Kinne	Allen H. Nohl
66-16744			
66-16877			
66-17026			
66-17105			
67-15186			
67-17341	David Nelson	Joel C. Hartley	Michael E. King
67-17462	Randy House	Patrick Hull	
67-17508			
67-17596	Frank Metsker	Arthur Martin	Ron Slee
67-17597	Ken Montgomery	Alfred Bradley; Stuart Brittman	Steve Barber
	Steve Lewis (?)		Ralf Fisher
	Albert Finn	William Dotson	Dan Felts
67-17598 (Challenger's Ship)	Bruce Fairley	Kenck	
67-17599	Larry Pluhar/ John Trotter/Randy Goulette	SP4 Steven Atherton	Hayes

67-17600	Larry Willette	R. D.Miller/George C. Garich/ Lannie Van Tassel	
67-17601	Steve Lewis	David Culbertson/Larry Moore/Joe Dodge	
67-17602	John Eaton	Joe Woods	Larry Padgett/Danny Walker
67-17603	John Hodnett /John Beeson	Abel L. Gomes/Pat Hull	Bryan Fitzgerald/ Stephen Gates
67-17604	Skip Lee/ Bill Majors	David Culbertson;Lannie Van Tassel	Jim Foreleo; Steve Wolfenbarger;Coulston (?)
67-17605		D. Kenck	
67-17606	Jamie Navarette/ Jack Glennon	Metcalf	Richards
	Ken Mayberry		
67-17607	Otto Offeriens/ Ken Mayberry/David Soyland	John Ackerman/ Skip Parker / James Snead/	Wayne Wasilk/ David Daily / McCrory/Allcorn, Gary
		Ralph Hart	Russ Hart
67-17610			
67-17611		Robert Foster;Larry Frazier/	Dennis R. Stockley
67-17612	Ted Olson	Robert Carmichael;David Drinkwater	
67-17613		Rick Carlton	
67-17614	Jerone James Warnick	Terry Mortensen/ Chip Bailey	Doyle Dunbar
67-17615			
67-17616	Roy Miller	Duncan / Terry Hilt	Terry Hilt
67-17617	Ron Nyhan/ Ken Newcom/ Don Swanson	Thomas Kiser/Ron Marek	
68-15248			
68-15401			
68-15460			
68-15484	Don Cornwell/ Rick Kincaid	Marvin Green/ Ric Swinehart/Jim Leonard	Jim Leonard
68-15563	Don Swanson	Amos	Mahlon R. Arnett
68-15770			
68-16052			

68-16065	Means	Dick Oder	John Robertson
68-16210			
68-16258		Ronnie McDonald (71)	James Orms
68-16288		Lannie Van Tassel/Brian Fitzgerald	
68-16307	Layne Heath /Paul Stewart	Charles Bobo	John Robertson
68-16375	Nick Saunders	Easterling	Carlton Gray
68-16389	Roy Miller;John Kamps	Larry Frazier/ Terry Hilt	
69-15173			
69-15186			
69-15412	Ken Morrow	Tom McCabe	David Daily
69-15612			
69-15662			
69-15705			
69-15773	Sean Moore	Rodney Lewis	Steve Lough
69-15775		Ron Marek	
69-15792			
69-15899	Rick Scrugham	Juan Pacheco	Bob Howe
69-16661			
69-16666			
69-16705			
69-16732			
70-15739		David Dailey	
70-15829			

Aircraft# 613 went down on April 23, 1969 at YC 554726. It would be repaired and fly again. Aircraft # 610 had a short shaft failure on May 18, 1969. Aircraft# 615 received damage from hostile fire on July 20, 1969 in the vicinity of YC 347878. Aircraft #603 had an engine failure on May 22, 1969 with CWO John Hodnett serving as the aircraft commander, Robert Y. Donnelly was the co-pilot and the crew chief was SP4 Abel L. Gomes and the door gunner was PFC Brian Fitzgerald. The aircraft was recovered and repaired and flew more missions.

A rocket attack on June 21, 1969 damaged five aircraft. Four were repaired by Phoenix maintenance and the fifth was sent to higher echelon maintenance for repair and returned for further duty. ⁹⁶

Aircraft 598 had radio problems so the radio console was replaced and it ceased to be a command and control aircraft. Major Lord assigned Bruce Fairley as the aircraft

commander with Kenck as the crew chief. It continued to have radio problems including intercom but Bruce just worked around the problem. ⁹⁷

Aircraft 67-17600 crashed in the Phoenix Nest. Here is the story of what happened:

67-17600 is the bird that went inverted outside the hanger under the careful hands of CPT Hodges and our famous Gary Sherman - Here's the description of the accident -ON 11 JUNE 1969, UH-1H SERIAL NUMBER 67-17600 CAME OUT OF EXTENSIVE MAINTENANCE AND WAS TO BE TEST FLOWN BEFORE IT WAS RELEASED FOR FLIGHT. CPT JOHN H. HODGES, 273RD TC DET COMMANDER, THE TEST PILOT, CHECKED THE AIRCRAFT OVER AND THEN RAN THE AIRCRAFT UP FOR A TAIL ROTOR TRACK. THE AIRCRAFT WAS SHUT DOWN AND THEN RESTARTED FOR THE TEST FLIGHT. CPT HODGES STARTED TO PICK THE AIRCRAFT UP TO A TWO FOOT HOVER TO CHECK THE TORQUE READING. HE THEN EASED UP TO WHERE IT WAS RESTING ON THE HEELS OF THE SKIDS. AS HE BROUGHT IT ON UP, THE AIRCRAFT BEGAN A GENTLE TURN TO THE RIGHT. AS HE WAS CORRECTING THIS THE CYCLIC WENT TO THE RIGHT AND THE AIRCRAFT BECAME UNCONTROLLABLE. THE PILOT WAS UNABLE TO CORRECT THE HARD RIGHT MOVEMENT OF THE CYCLIC AND THE MAIN ROTOR BLADE STRUCK THE GROUND ON THE RIGHT SIDE CAUSING THE TRANSMISSION AND ROTOR SYSTEM TO COME OUT THE TOP OF THE AIRCRAFT AND THE FUSELAGE TO BECOME INVERTED. 7- THE PILOT AND CO-PILOT SHUT THE ENGINE DOWN AND WERE HELPED OUT OF THE AIRCRAFT BY THE CREW CHIEF AND THE TECHNICAL OBSERVER, THAT WERE ABOARD THE AIRCRAFT.

Feeling fully unappreciated, 600 spent the next year getting repaired by Bell Helicopter, and went back to Vietnam to live a more prosperous life with the 129th Assault Helicopter Company until 3-72.

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Remarkably no one was hurt. John Kamps who was brand new to the unit was in the back seat of the aircraft when it turned over before he could fasten his seat belt. There was SSG Steveson and a couple of other enlisted personnel who were on board to qualify for their flight pay for the month. Carlton helped to get everyone out of the aircraft.

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Aircraft #736 was an in-country refit and was an old Medvac aircraft. You could still see the Red Crosses under the paint on the doors. ³³ 736 is now property of National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, Georgia and is being restored. It will be placed beside the parade field adjoining the museum. ⁹⁸

Aircraft 67-17596 was damaged when Bruce Updyke was flying her on December 12, 1970. She was transferred to the 142 TC in Vietnam and then transferred to St' Louis and

then to Fort Worth, Texas until December, 1971. Then she was transferred to Fort Rucker until December, 1975 when the records stopped. ¹²¹

Aircraft 67-17599 is alive and well and was at a military museum in Aurora, Illinois. In June 2008, a Vietnam Veterans of America chapter # 380 in Marquette County, Michigan had procured 599 and it has been moved to that location. It is being restored and will have the original logbook in the aircraft when it is dedicated on July 5th, 2009. Aircraft 599 served with the 236th Air Ambulance Company and saw duty in Southwest Asia in Iraq during Operation Desert Storm. When 599 was transferred to the museum, Pat Hull obtained the historical records for the aircraft and they are inside her when she was dedicated in Marguette County. ¹⁰⁴ Aircraft # 616 was damaged by a booby trap and it was rebuilt in Corpus Christi and was issued to Company A, 158th. 616 was shot down in Laos and destroyed in place. Mayberry found his aircraft, 67-17607, serving with an Air Cavalry unit in Scottsdale, Arizona in 1993 ⁹²

Aircraft 67-17606 ended up in the Arizona National Guard. This was the aircraft that Ken Mayberry was flying at the evacuation of Fire Base Ripcord. It was repaired and transferred to Company "A", 158th Aviation Battalion. ¹²¹

Larry Frazier found his aircraft 67-17611 at American Legion Post 409 in Gowanda, New York. This aircraft is the only original aircraft that served with the unit throughout the time in Viet Nam. Other aircraft were assigned then damaged and then reassigned to other units in Vietnam. Larry is in the process of restoring 611. ¹²³

8. History of the Officer's Club

Every unit had a place, which was a gathering location so guys could compare missions and tell stories and the Phoenix were no exception. Skip Lee would occasionally provide entertainment with singing "Green, Green, Grass of Home" on his guitar. I think that was the only song Skip knew. What became the Officer's Club was an extra hootch or two, possibly a mess hall based on its "L" shape. In late June, 1969, Walt Thompson, Gary Earls, and Jim Boehringer spent a couple of nights there until they got their room assignments. In July or August we begin to build the club. Someone worked out a deal with the SeaBees (US Navy Construction Battalion) to provide the construction expertise and to help us construct this monument. The deal was we would provide aerial transportation for the SeaBees. I think their headquarters were in DaNang. ⁴

Steve Bookout was assigned to obtain initial bar decorations and anything else he could obtain from beer companies. He was able to get some towels, napkins and 500 plastic glasses from Holiday Inn. Budweiser donated two illuminated Clydesdale horses, several bar mats, coasters, and other items. ¹²⁵

CPT Steve Rotsart became one of our procurers of supplies for the club. I believe that he went down to Saigon area and possibly the Phillipines to get some supplies. Don

Swanson had worked in Reno at "Harrah's" so Don knew what kind of equipment he needed to provide an oasis in this sea of uncertainty. Skip Lee recalls how the furnishings came to be. " While I'm at it, I would like to set the record straight on the club and the Furnishings. They came from Okinawa. One evening, (CPT Donald) Swanson and I were talking (over several cold ones) about what was needed to finish the club. We came to the conclusion that we would not find it in country that led to a discussion where we could find everything. I told him that I have pulled a couple of previous tours in Okinawa so I knew my way around well enough to find what we wanted. We went to (Major) Karjala, the company commander with the idea. Karjala had enough drinks in him at the time that it sounded like a good idea to him. The next day I had someone drop me off at Phu Bai without the faintest idea of how I was going to get to Okinawa. I thought about heading to Saigon and then taking it from there. While I was standing there, a Marine Corps C-130 taxied in. I went over to the pilots and asked them where they were flying out of. They said Futema in Okinawa. I asked them if they were going there. They said they were the next day but they could only pick up passengers in DaNang. I caught a Chinook to DaNang and went to the Marine Corps flight operations. They said that I needed orders to get on the flight. I then went to the 282nd Assault Helicopter Company and looked up the maintenance office, a friend and classmate of mine named Mike Michaud. I asked him to use his typewriter and sat down and typed a set of official looking orders sending me to Okinawa to testify in courts-martial trial of somebody I made up. Mike signed the orders as a Colonel somebody. I took them back to the flight operations and was given first priority because I was on official military orders. The plane was full of Marine grunts so when the pilots saw me they brought me up into the cockpit for the five-hour flight. I told them what my mission to Okinawa was and one of them volunteered that I needed someplace to store the stuff I bought. When we landed he took me over to a Gunny (Gunnery Sergeant) and told him to give me a storeroom in the hanger. He gave me a room and a padlock to store things as I bought them.

The next day I started shopping, along with a few other things. Whenever I bought anything I would have it delivered to the hanger and put on a pallet. After about a week of serious shopping I decided I better get on back to where I belonged. The Gunny had the C-130 that was scheduled for that day's run backed up to the door of the hanger and had the pallet covered with a big net loaded in the back of the plane. The pilots cranked it up and away we went. Again, I was in the cockpit. I called flight operations on FM from the airplane about the time we got adjacent to Camp Evans. I suggested about five Hueys were needed at DaNang Main in about one hour. By the time we got the pallet unloaded a flight of five landed and we started loading. There were air conditioners, a couple of upright freezers, flood and spot lights, carpeting, upholstery for the bar and miscellaneous other necessities. The red wall paper was ordered out of a Sears catalog.²⁸

The bar was triple-thick, approximately three inches, so it could provide an instant shelter during rocket attacks. The wall covering was a red velvet type. Someone made a large Phoenix bird to hang on the wall in the fall of 1969. We celebrated the opening night with a big party and even flew out to the hospital ship and brought those nurses to the party. There were all sorts of people there and they seem to enjoy the opportunity to

escape the rigors of war for a few hours. We would have movies shown in the club because of a deal that we had worked out with a Navy Patrol Boat base near Hue/Phu Bai. The Navy got newer releases and needed transportation to DaNang on occasions so the deal was done since we were in the transportation business. We borrowed their movies and they got transportation. It worked well for all concerned.

It was either the night of December 24th or December 31st, 1969, we had a party going on and it was after curfew when the 3rd Brigade duty officer entered the club and attempted to shut it down since it was open after midnight. It was a big mistake on his part. He was thrown out and was told not to come back. We continued our celebration.

After the death of Don Swanson, Major Lord appointed Bruce Fairley, the club officer. It was about this time when a scandal appeared in the Army club system, Major Lord wanted to make sure that the club wasn't making excess profits. The Phoenix club had made three thousand dollars profit for the month. They did this by charging fifteen cents for beer, fifteen cents for mixed drinks and twenty cents per drink for mixed drinks with Jack Daniels whiskey.⁷⁰

9. Christmas Eve Tradition, 1969 and 1970

Strange things happen in combat zones and Christmas Eve in Northern I Corps wasn't any different. Gary Earls was assigned to Company "C", 158th Aviation Battalion, 101st Airborne Division and I was doing my duty as the 158th Aviation Battalion perimeter defense officer during the month of December, 1969. It got to be routine with watching the night duty officer inspect the guards from the different aviation companies.

About two weeks before Christmas, several of the warrant officers (John Eaton, Skip Lee, John Hodnett)came to Earls and asked if they could perform guard duty on the night of December 24th. These warrants were part of the original members of the unit and had seen the company become an effective combat aviation unit. Their plan was to have the enlisted personnel take the night off and give the troops a party on that night. We all appreciated the long hours that our crews worked and thought they should be rewarded in some way. Earls' response was that he didn't care who was standing guard as long as we had guards to man the bunkers on the perimeter. Earls gave them twenty dollars toward the party. It didn't dawn on Earls to get permission to have the officers' substitute for the enlisted men. It just seemed to be a good idea and no one would be the wiser if they were the guards for the night. Also we thought that there would be a Christmas cease fire and it would be a good time for a little relaxation time for all.

As the time drew near to the 24th, a "maintenance" flight was arranged to go to DaNang to the larger Class 6 store to procure the proper amount of adult beverages for the troop party. We decided that if we went into the PX at Camp Evans and bought a large amount of liquor then questions would be asked and the possibility that the party would be cancelled. We had purchased large quantities for our company before when our resupply train had been attacked by the North Vietnamese Army during the summer but that's another story.

Earls had forgotten about the arrangement for the night of the 24th. He was watching the night duty officer assemble the guards and I realized that the guards from my company were missing. They had been delayed by a First Sergeant who wanted to know what they were doing. When they replied that they were taking over guard duties that night, the First Sergeant also known as “The Bear” was speechless. He was getting worried about my “no shows” when he heard a commotion behind him. The “guards” from Charlie Company were coming down the road. They weren’t marching in a formation just a mob moving down the road to the guards’ location. They looked like a “Mexican” bandit gang from the movie “The Magnificent Seven”. Each man was wearing crossed bandoliers of ammunition and at least two or three weapons per man. They all looked like they hadn’t shaved in two or three days and it looked like they had slept in their jungle fatigues as well. It wasn’t the imitation of the “Old Guard” that I was expecting. The other guards were watching this spectacle in total amazement.

They got into “formation” just in time for the battalion commander, LTC Joseph Kastner to walk out the door on his way to the evening meal. Earls was hoping that the colonel wouldn’t notice the Charlie Company substitutes. Earls didn’t want to explain why there were officers in the guard formation. Col. Kastner looked at the Charlie company “mob” which stood out from the other guards and then looked at Earls and then back at the mob. He just shook his head. Earls thought that he had just guaranteed himself a spot in the Long Binh jail for conduct unbecoming an officer and any other offense that LTC Kastner could find. Earls was sure that he would counsel our company commander who would transfer me to the worst spot in Viet Nam, but, we never heard any negative comments from the headquarters staff.

The Charlie Company guards who were unfamiliar with proper procedures on a bunker line used all of the flares that night with occasional burst of M-16 and M-60 weapons. They were also teasing the enemy to come out and fight. They kept calling “Uncle Ho” all sorts of dirty names. John Eaton who was one of the guards, stated that there were heavy casualties among the frog population that night. They had used up so much ammunition that it was almost to the point that they had to call for an ammunition resupply. The residents of the local village probably didn’t get any sleep that night either. The sector that night earned the reputation of having a “Mad Evening” rather than a “Mad Minute” that we all have experienced during our tour. At least there wasn’t anyone asleep in the Charlie Company sector that night. One of the benefits was that the pilots experienced what the crew chiefs and door gunners went through on guard duty.

The enlisted guys had a good time at the party and a welcome night off. They could sleep in the next morning and many needed the extra sleep to recover from the party. It was an excellent morale booster for our guys. The 101st had a policy that enlisted couldn’t have hard liquor. That didn’t make any sense to us since our crew members were taking the same risks as us pilots. That’s why we made sure they had hard liquor as well as a proper amount of beer and soda.

The word got around Camp Evans about the Charlie Company “guards”. We heard from the pilots in the other aviation companies that their enlisted personnel wanted a night off too. They were irritated at us for starting a new tradition. We were glad that we gave the guys a night off with a party.

The next Christmas the pilots of Charlie Company continued the tradition but this time the company executive officer inspected the officers before they joined the rest of guards. No “Mexican” bandit gang looks were allowed and they had to know their general orders before they assembled for the guard formation. That the night was much quieter also. At least the local residents got a better night’s sleep and the frogs didn’t have to worry either. 105

“ LEST WE FORGET ”

10. Died after Tour

1. James Boehringer, died 4 Jan ,1993, Troy, Michigan
2. Frederick Daniloff, died Feb, 1974, aircraft accident
3. Phillip F. Hickey, died in an aircraft accident on August 1, 1985. Louisiana
4. Paul Almer, died 12 April, 1989 in an aircraft accident in Pennsylvania
5. Phil Rutledge. Died in an aircraft accident, June 18,2003 in California
6. Richard “Rick” Morrow, died June 6, 2005
7. Joseph Paul (Blue) McCrory (?)
- 8 .Edward W. Zick, died in May 2006 in Minnesota
9. John T. (Jack) Glennon, died October 4, 2006, cancer, buried at Arlington National Cemetery
- 10 William J. Head, 27 Feb 1990, aircraft accident
- 11 .Clarence F. Copney,III, 9 Jan 2000 in Texas
12. Larry J. Willette, auto accident in North Carolina 2004
13. Thomas L. Bankley, January 1, 1994
14. David Bench, May, 1977, San Mateo, CA
15. Kenneth V. Brown, November 27, 1999
16. Fred Brown, October, 1984, Wayne, Michigan
17. Daniel Campbell, July, 1973
18. Charles W. Deans, November 28, 2002, Johnston, NC
19. John W. Harrison, III, January, 1975
20. James L. Hayes, November 14, 2006, Bee Spring, KY
21. Daniel K. Lang, May, 20, 2001, Hardeee, FL

22. Charles T. Lenceski, October 11, 2008, Wentzville, MO
23. Robert F. Stevenson, August 31, 2004, Lawrence, PA
24. George Graves, July, 1980, Hope Mills, NC
25. Gregory Von Eschen, March, 1975
26. Ernest V. Adkins, 8 Sep 2001, Hope, AR
27. John E. Hodnett, December 8, 2009, Arlington, Texas, cancer
28. Dwane Connell, September 24, 2005, Kenosha, WI
29. Steven A. Smith, April 21, 2004, McDonough, GA
30. Bruce W. Morrison, June, 1992
31. Gregory A. Boksa, March17, 1992

32. Roosevelt Daniel, November 8, 2002
33. Richard Freese, July, 1987
34. Nikolaj Hobczuk, January 3, 2003
35. Roumaldo M. Gonzalez, February 11, 2000, San Angelo, TX
36. Rocky Brown, October, 1991, Opelousas, LA
37. Billy J. Langley, June 10, 1993, McFarland. CA
38. John T. Griffin
39. Terry Hilt, December 26, 2012, Indianapolis VA hospital, IN; buried at Arlington National Cemetery, June 27, 2013
40. Otto E. Offereins, November 20, 2012
41. Thomas A. Tindor, August 8, 2012, Savannah Georgia
42. Tim Dungan, May 23, 2013, Dayton Ohio
43. Thomas M. Murphy, 2013, M.S.
44. James Forleo, June 9, 1998, cancer.
45. Neil Charles Doty, May 30, 2015, cancer
46. James Lloyd, July, 2015, heart attack
47. Layne C. Heath, June 10, 2012, Hideaway, Texas
48. Carl V. Hunt, January 6, 2016

11. Unit Awards

DA Pamphlet 672-3 dated 1988 lists the following unit awards:

Presidential Unit Citation: 8 Feb-28 Mar 71; DAGO 13, 1974

Valorous Unit Award: 22-23 Jul 70; DAGO 50, 1971

RVN Cross of Gallantry w/ palm: 21 Feb-14 May 69; DA GO 43 1970
 18 Apr-31 May 71; DA GO 6, 1971
 1 Mar-9 Oct 71; DA GO 6, 1971
 6-19 Sep 71, DA GO 6, 1971

RVN Civic Action Honor Medal-First Class: 2 Feb 69-2 May 70; DA GO 48, 1971
 30 Oct-7 Dec 70; DA GO 11, 1973

Additionally President Thieu of South Viet Nam awarded every military member a "RVN Cross of Gallantry w/palm for their service. There isn't any difference with unit award and individual award so you can wear both. 124

12. Unexpected consequences

Whatever happened to Bob Brooks? The last time I seen him I think was at the VHPA reunion in Atlanta. All of us that were present there remember what happened.

We were all gathered in Phoenix ops – Jack Glennon's suite – drinking adult beverages and making small talk when a gentleman appeared in the doorway and announced "Is Bob Brooks Here?" I recall the gentleman had a pair of shorts on and I believe his left leg had obviously suffered massive trauma at some point in time. About that time Bob came out of the bathroom where he had rescued an aluminum can from drowning in a tub of ice. He said "I'm Bob Brooks'. The unknown gentlemen said "You saved my life in Vietnam" and wrapped his arms around Bob and was in tears. It was extremely emotional scene. Bob then took the gentleman out into the hallway where they could talk privately. They soon reentered the room and explained what happened.

- Bob was at Eagle when the tower made a blanket call to all aircraft. A Ranger team in the Ashu Valley was under attack and needed to be extracted, can someone help?. Bob volunteered along with I think three or four other aircraft. They formed up and headed to the Valley. When they arrived the gentleman in the room was the first aircraft to attempt the extraction unfortunately he was shot down and badly injured in the crash. The crew was able to scramble out of the aircraft, the pilot was able to get out and drug himself behind a fallen tree. Bob made it into the LZ to extract the fallen crewmen. They got all the crewmen except the pilot however Bob knew where the pilot was and told his crew he was hiding behind a fallen tree.

Our stranger then piped up with his story. He said he thought he was going to be left and he pulled out his gun and was going to shoot Bob if he had tried to leave without him. Bob then said NO that was not going to have happened because he had seen him when he landed and knew where he was.

The stranger went on to say that he was evacuated to Japan where he underwent surgery. The doctors there said they need to amputate his leg but he refused to allow them to do it and even called his father in the states. I don't know if his father had any clout but they did not amputee his leg. He said that he had multiple operations it was seven years or seven operations that he underwent in the states but they were successful and is leg was usable.

Wasn't Bob from Dubuque Iowa?

Guys please help me and explain where I screwed this story up. Thank you –ken 126

13. Acts of Valor

Any act of valor was treated like it was just a normal act and not deserving of any recognition. However there were exceptions and one of them was the heroism demonstrated by crew chief, Jimmy Snead. Snead's best friend was his door gunner who had red hair. McCrory, the gunner hated to be called "Red" so he got the nickname of "Blue". Snead who was African-American was given the nickname, "Black". If you saw one then you would see the other. They were a great team.

Bob Kelly wrote the story:

On April 16, 1969 two Phoenix aircraft were assigned a mission to support a Delta Force unit. Myself (Bob Kelly, Phoenix 44) as aircraft commander, Bob Brooks as copilot, were assigned to fly A/C 604 with the crew chief/door gunner team known as "Black and Blue" (Snead and the red headed door gunner). The aircraft commander of the other assigned Phoenix aircraft was Captain Maury (Battalion Staff). Both aircraft were dispatched, with myself as lead, to a temporary Delta Force location in the foothills west of Phu Bai. Upon Landing at this temporary Delta Force location we discovered that another aircraft from B Company 101 Assault Helicopter Battalion (Kingsmen) was also assigned as a supplemental aircraft for this mission. I knew the aircraft commander of this Kingsmen aircraft (CW-2 Williams) to be a short timer and more senior than me, so as a courtesy, I offered him to be the flight lead of this 3 ship insertion mission, with Maury's aircraft chalk 2 and my aircraft chalk 3.

This very unique Delta force unit consisted of about 40 oriental mercenaries and about 8 Americans. These Americans were not identified by any uniform service or rank insignias'. The mission was set up very similar to the CCN insertion missions that we frequently supported. This was to be a 3 ship insertion into a one ship LZ in the vicinity of Laos, with cobra gunship support, Air

Force OV-1 and Fast mover support.

On short final to this one ship LZ the lead B Company Kingsmen aircraft came under intense enemy fire, crashed and was on fire. Chalk 2 (Captains Maury's Phoenix aircraft also came under intense fire and broke off their approach. My Aircraft (604) continued and was able to land about 100 Feet from the burning downed aircraft. During this time both Snead and "Blue" were utilizing their M60's for suppressive fire. Soon after landing the crew chief and the door gunner of the downed aircraft were able to get into our aircraft even though they were both wounded. I noticed the Aircraft commander (Williams) of the downed aircraft waving from behind a fallen tree. I asked Snead to go get him. Without hesitation Snead jumped out of our Aircraft, despite extensive enemy fire, he ran the 100 feet to the wounded Aircraft Commander and assisted him, get to and on our aircraft. The wounded aircraft Commander had extensive leg wounds. I asked these crew members about the copilot, their response was that he had been shot in the head and was dead.

Our cover aircraft had continually advised via radio that when we exited the LZ we should not proceed to the left. I had unintentionally broke left upon exiting the LZ wanting to get the wounded crew members to the Phu Bai Hospital as soon as possible and then discovered looking out my side window an unmanned mounted weapon.

Snead showed a complete disregard for his own safety and was awarded the Silver Star. The door gunner "Blue" was awarded the Bronze Star. Both I and Bob Brooks were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. ¹³⁹

14. Notes

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