

No Tail – No Fly

Thu Douc 7 August 1967 The Blackhawks

We called ourselves the Blackhawks, but the Army called us the 187th Assault Helicopter Company in Tay Ninh Vietnam. My call sign was "Blackhawk 54", or "Crash" Coe to my pilot buddies. WO David Webster was my co-pilot and SP4 M. Martin "Magnet Ass" Jansen was the crew chief, and SP4 James Holston was the gunner on the UH-1 D model aircraft #64-13817.

Major Bill Bauman was sending his helicopters into a landing zone where there had been no artillery fire or gunship prep, while the flight was on base, the Rat Pack (our Gun Ships) was seeing troops in uniform and ask if they were ARVN.

We were to insert a combo force of US and ARVN Troops across from Phu Loi, the insertion was to take place beside a river. As typical of ARVN insertions, it was to be a cold LZ. We were told there would be no suppression by the slick guns.

As the gun ships make their fly overs prior to our landing, they started taking heavy fire from dug-in emplacements. (Later Jansen heard one of the gunship crew man say he had seen a boat with a large caliber gun set up on it.) The Rat Pack informed Maj. Bauman of the heavy fire. The ground commander in the C&C ship again stated " No suppression by any aircraft." The gun ships continued taking heavy fire and Maj. Bauman called for everyone to return fire, which was the Bauman I knew.

We were all extremely nervous and the troops were silent. We were observing radio silence, so even the radio was quiet. The formation was so tight, every pilot straining to keep his helicopter full of troops in the correct chock (position), there were only a few feet separating each helicopter in my

flight of Blackhawks. Our orders were to insert our load of troops into the right side of the landing zone as far to the front as we could get. As we got closer to the landing zone it looked like we were in for some serious trouble.

As we started our approach we could see the fight unfold in front of us, they opened up from their foxholes and tracers were coming up in a huge volume. Our gunners were shooting out the side of the aircraft and the formation was spewing 7.62 out of 16 machine-guns at a horrendous rate.

As I started to cross over the tree line into the landing zone on final, in my UH-1D, the entire world seemed to erupt as the NVA crawled out of their foxholes and started to shoot at the low flying helicopters. I was trying to be as smooth as possible, but all hell was breaking loose, and aircraft in the formation started taking hits and calling mayday, mayday, mayday chock four wounded Pilot on board, breaking off, mayday, mayday, mayday trail is going in, mayday, mayday, mayday chock two has wounded, breaking out. Six of my formation were shot up and two were still in the landing zone all shot to pieces, the grunts were taking heavy casualties and we could not suppress the small arms fire coming from the tree line.

The Rat Pack threw everything they had at the tree line. The sound of the rockets whooshing past the flight and the serious roar of the mini guns working let us know we were not in the fight alone.

When we unloaded the troops, an ARVN Radio Telephone Operator refused to get off our helicopter. Gunner Jim Holston and Marvin Jansen tried to throw him off, but he got behind the pilots center console where they could not reach him.

After we lifted off, Maj. Bauman asked Captain Presson if another insertion attempt was unwise. He replied that the troops needed the additional support. Captain Billie

Presson, all heart and balls. We had four ships left to insert the next lift.

Chalk eight, aircraft 66-926 with Aircraft Commander W01 John M. Yirak and Pilot CW2 William J. Koch were cleared for a one-time flight to Phu Loi with numerous bullet holes throughout the aircraft.

The Flight Leader, Capt. Presson, reported that there were four flyable aircraft in the PZ and that they were loaded with troops. Aircraft 66-932 with AC Captain Jerry T. Wagner and Pilot W0 Robert L. Pinckney had now joined the flight as the fourth aircraft. Blackhawk "6" was monitoring the ground commander's frequency and asked him what the situation was on the ground. He replied that the ground forces had not received fire for more than thirty minutes and that he considered it safe to bring in the next lift.

We left the PZ with our load of troops and headed for the LZ, we all were sweating heavily. Maj. Bauman let us shoot out of the right side of the helicopter. Just as I brought the helicopter to a hover, a NVA uniformed soldier stepped from the bamboo tree line just past the end of my rotor blades and shot an entire clip from his AK-47 through the windshield of my helicopter. I thought I was dead. I had been hit but did not know how bad. My co-pilot was slumped in his seat. The windshield was full of holes and most of the instrument panel was blown to shreds with electrical sparking and smoke everywhere. I pulled pitch and went right up and over the NVA soldier putting a new clip in his AK-47. The transmission was screaming like a woman in pain from all the rounds in it. We tried to call mayday, but none of the radios would work. I switch to hot mike and guard, but still nothing would transmit.

At about an altitude of about 200 feet and out over the river my aircraft was hit by a fifty cal. antiaircraft weapon. The entire tail boom came apart on my aircraft. My crew chief

could see the tail rotor not spinning, just hanging. The tail boom, wrinkled and bent starting to come off the aircraft. Over the intercom my gunner said the fuel cell was burning and his smoke grenades were going off.

The torque of the engine started the helicopter spinning and the gyroscopic procession flipped the helicopter up on its side and then over. I slammed the collective down and rolled the throttle off. We were completely out of control now and starting to spin in the other direction but not as violently. It is hard to know just how many times the helicopter flipped over in the air.

As my burning shot to shit helicopter neared the ground, I knew I had little cyclic control and only the pitch and throttle to get me on the ground. I waited and waited and waited for what seemed to be a lifetime while my crippled ship fell out of the sky. At the last possible second I tried to level the helicopter and rolled on the throttle and pulled pitch. The helicopter stopped spinning and I got it close to the rice paddy. The forward motion and the attitude of the helicopter caused one of the rotor blades to hit the ground and the helicopter beat its self to death right beside the river.

I was in the left seat and was wet from the water in the flooded rice paddy. I could not breath. In the violence of the crash I had the wind knocked out of me and I was struggling to find the harness release some where in the muddy water. I was starting to panic. I calmed my screaming mind and found and pulled the release on the harness and started to climb out of the burning helicopter. The fire was in the back and spreading so I tried to climb out the co-pilots door above me. I was so weak and beat up I could not climb out of the helicopter. My crew chief M. Martin "Magnet Ass" Jansen was standing on the side of the burning helicopter. He grabbed me by the edges of my helmet and dragged me out of the burning wreckage. His second rescue having first freed the leg of

the gunner that had been trapped in the mud under the weight of a burning helicopter. Jansen went back to the burning helicopter twice to get us all out. The gunner's seat belt mounts pulled out of the bulkhead on impact and threw him into the butterfly handles of his M-60, breaking his nose. Jansen remembers looking up at the sky while spinning out of control and seeing ammo boxes flying around thinking that they were going to hurt when they hit him.

When I hit the rice paddy, I looked around and all four of us that had left that morning from Can Tho were still alive. We were cut up from the flying plexi-glass and shrapnel, thrashed and broken from the experience, but still alive.

I pulled out my survival radio to call for a ride home, but before I could key the mike there was a 118th AHC, Thunderbird shooting an approach to us. They were in the area and they saw us tumbling out of the sky with out a tail boom. They followed us down and were happy to see four survivors. There was a chaplain on the rescue helicopter and he was shooting out of the door with his carbine, just like the rest of us. One of the Crew was a Texan and commented on the Texas flag Jansen had on his helmet. Texans bonding with each other where ever they go. It must be a sickness.

The 118th rescue ship took us to the hospital and the Doctors started pulling pieces of plexi-glass out of all of us. They kept my gunner for the night.

After the trip to the hospital, Major Bauman put me in another helicopter. I do not remember the tail number, but I am certain that it was not a Blackhawk aircraft. I had never met the crew or the Peter Pilot. I do remember very clearly the Peter Pilot telling me that he had just been released from the hospital after being shot through both legs with one bullet, a large caliber round, on a combat assault. He had some horrible scars he showed me, and it was his first time in a helicopter since the hospital in Japan. I thought it was out of place

when this stranger dropped his pants and showed me his mangled legs. Still bright pink and angry looking. It was obvious he had been through hell and back.

So many people had been hit on the ground, and ammo was being expended at a huge rate, we were sent back to the Landing Zone by Bauman to take in ammo and take out the wounded.

As I started my single ship hot approach to the landing zone looking for the wounded grunts, there was so much shooting going on, and people in desperate trouble calling on all three of my radios, my new co-pilot completely freaked out and started to fight me for the controls of the helicopter. He did not want to go into the landing zone, it was not a pretty picture with all the tracers coming up at us, and the medics calling for medevac on the radios. The crew chief came to my aid by pulling the seat release and harness, pulling the screaming out of control peter pilot away from the controls, so I kept coming hot and fast and at the last possible second flared and came to a hover right beside our load of wounded, kicked out the ammo we had on board. Loaded as fast as we could and pulled pitch and went out the way we had come in.

The trip to the hospital with the wounded and flipped out pilot only took a few minutes. I had called the hospital and advised them of the nature of the injuries and the crazy pilot.

On the hospital pad, my crew and I checked out the helicopter and made sure it was safe to fly. I installed my crew chief as peter pilot and we went back to the landing zone to haul ammo in and wounded out. We kept taking hits and one of them hit a hydraulic line. Helicopters are hard to fly when everything works perfectly, they are dangerously difficult with no hydraulics. My crew chief/peter pilot and I made it to the hospital pad with our load of wounded, but that helicopter never flew again. They dragged it off the pad with a jeep and some wheels. I never saw that aircraft again. It was a total

loss for someone.

My first crew chief Martin Jansen received a Distinguished Flying Cross, he deserved more.

I still do not know who the second crew chief was, I did not know then. He was the real hero, saved all our lives. I don't think he got anything more than a pat on the back and the satisfaction of a job well done.

I got on a Medevac helicopter at the hospital and went to Saigon, and from there took a courier from Hotel-3 back to Tay Ninh. When I got there, I was the first to return. It was a quiet evening waiting for the Blackhawks to return. They came back in the morning and performed a 360 degree overhead with smoke. All of the pilots and crew ran to the flight line to cheer them back. It brings tears to my eyes to remember how we closed ranks after a fight. The 187th Assault Helicopter Company stood down for a few days. General Senif flew in and pinned on a Silver Star for me, DFC's, for the rest of the crew. I still do not know who the other crew was or what company they were from. I owe my life to an unknown man.

©Wayne R. "Crash" Coe and Martin "Magnet Ass" Jansen

August 7, 1967 – Razorback 33

January 4, 1991

Dear Bob:

I read with interest your letter to the editor and account of the action your unit was involved in near Bien Hoa. I became quite emotionally affected, as I was caught up in that same

action – and your account brought back some memories long ago buried in my mind. Suppose it would be best if I could share with you my recollections of that fateful day. You are the first person, other than my crew, that I've found who was there and had some idea of the events that day. Possibly I should start by telling you how and why our fire team became involved in your unit's "ballgame."

I was Razorback 33 and was flying with Razorback 3_? (Al Cornell) leading a light fire team working alone in the pineapple fields, just west of Saigon (DUC HOA or MUC HOA area). We had made a few attacks on bunkers when we received a call from a USAF FAC flying an 01 Birdog over your area of operations. He told us that the operation was in trouble – he spotted our smoke/explosions – and requested our assistance to help in a re-supply effort. We immediately broke off and headed for your area at top speed, following his directions – soon seeing smoke rising from your LZ and surrounding paddies. Upon over flying your LZ and adjacent rice paddies, we saw a number of burning helicopters, 5 or 7, it's difficult to remember. I do remember telling the team that "those guys must have been ambushed." I thought of command detonated mines or artillery rounds in the LZ, something such as that. Upon arriving, the FAX was telling a TOP TIGER ship to wait for my team, as we would accompany him in to re-supply. My plan was to suppress the dike area boundary to the east of the LZ, as it was heavily vegetated, or hit wherever we drew fire on approach. The TOP TIGER ship set up a left base into the rice paddy, landing to the north – without waiting for my team to join up on him. We, the FAC and me, hollered for him to stop – not go in – yet he continued! Just as he approached the ground, centered in the paddy, he was hit and the ship rolled over. I couldn't tell if he was hit by a mine or went over as the result of other fire. One thing stuck in my mind – no one was getting out – I saw no one crawl out of the wreckage and no one went in after them. The aircraft was not on fire, so I wanted to get them out of the wreckage – before it burned. We

told our wing ship to cover us, we were going in to get them out – granted in hindsight, not very smart – yet we didn't want them to burn.

We went in, took a close look at the TOP TIGER bird, saw the infantry troopers flat on their stomachs across the area, some pointing to the east dike. As we took this in, our ship took hits, my starboard pod of 24 rockets (we had a "HOG") was set ablaze and my starboard door gunner took a round through his neck – sending him through the air and almost out the left side. A round had also hit the oil reservoir, as you may remember it was positioned just aft of the firewall and on the right side of the engine. The pressure reservoir split open with a resultant immediate loss of oil pressure. I could see we were next in order of burning ships, and our concern shifted from the TOP TIGER bird to our door gunner. I didn't know what his condition was, but he was alive and knew we had only seconds left to get him out. Full power/pitch was pulled as we pointed our bird straight for the line of black pajama clad VC lined across the dike firing at will at us some 25 yards away.

The rockets wouldn't fire, so I raked my hand across the center console to hit the toggle switch, safety wired off, to activate the explosive bolts mounting the rocket pods to the aircraft. They did blow the pods broke off as we climbed out and over the VC. To this day, I don't know if or how many of the bastards we took with us – I can only hope all was not in vain in that some of them bought it! We turned back west, along the waterway just North of the LZ and made it about two clicks before going in, no further damage to our ship, but our engine was gone – (that engine will run for a short while without oil!) and we wanted our wingman to get our door gunner to the hospital ASAP.

Well, that's what I saw of that day – the General officer – a BG landed at our ship to see how we made out – then took off to go back and orbit over the area where he then took fire and

was hit, along with his aide, the same two you wrote about. That wasn't very smart of him as well. Shortly after, I went to your base at Tay Ninh. It was there where I bought your officers club a round of drinks after entering covered. I couldn't tell it was a club! It was also there where I learned from your pilots some more of the story. I was told that the Command and Control had not allowed your guns to hit the area prior to assault – supposedly there were no “enemy” and the LZ was cold. As usual, I was told that the “counterpart” wouldn't approve suppression of the LZ. Again, if factual – dumb as dirt! How many times has that occurred? I've often wondered how many were killed needlessly in the action of that day. I learned a lesson I never forgot on that one – thereafter and on the following tour in Viet Nam as a gun driver, C&C and as the Commander of the 162d Assault Helicopter Company, I never bought that line of bull – always, always, always shot up everything in sight on our assaults – Vietnamese like it or not!! One thing for sure – never an ambush, no burning helicopters in the LZ!

Well, I've said a little – “coming out of the closet”, I suppose as the result of your writing. Also please don't construe my commends to cast a negative light on the efforts of the TOP TIGER aircraft commander, whoever he was, as I hold all my comrades in highest esteem. Just another case of “maybe it didn't have to happen that way”. Why he didn't wait will only be known to him and God. So much has been held up inside of me these past 20 years. I'm sure you understand.....

Sincerely,

Ken

January 1968 – FSB Burt and The Hourglass

1. FSB Burt was located astride Route 244, probably at about XT500805. Route 246 runs northwest through Bo Tuc and then Katum.



2. According to radio logs from the 187th AHC, The Hourglass was due north of FSB Burt at XT500890. It was about 4 Km south of the Cambodian border. It's probably the clearing just north of the words "Suoi Tanken"



On the night of January 1 – 2, 1968 , the 2-22 Infantry (Mechanized), 3-22 Infantry, and the 2-77 Artillery (25th Infantry Division) were involved in a massive human wave attack by four battalions of NVA and VC at a place called Fire Support Base Burt in Vietnam. Throughout the night, the 22nd Infantrymen, supported by their artillery brothers and

helicopter crewman from the 187th and 188th Assault Helicopter Companies fought back against the determined enemy assault. When the firing stopped between 0530 and 0600 the next morning, The Americans were victorious in repulsing the attack. Over 401 NVA and VC were killed with American losses at 23 killed and 153 wounded.

The battle for Fire Support Base (FSB) Burt, also known as the Battle of Soui Cut was "memorialized" in the last battle scene in the movie "Platoon". Oliver Stone was there that night as a grunt with Bravo Company 3rd of the 22nd Infantry. He was hit and eventually medevac'd. I think he got hit during the morning stage.

I will post this summary of the Infantry After Action Report. I only start with the human wave attacks during the early hours of January 2, 1968. It was this action that gun crews from the "Ratpack", 187th AHC, and a couple of "slick" crews were in support of the ground troops engaged at FSB Burt. I flew during that night dropping flares. Another of our slick pilots Wayne "Crash" Coe also flew that night resupplying and medevac'ing wounded. His story is [here](#)

Infantry After Action Summary

The main force of the attack began at approximately 0001 hours, beginning at the northern portion of the perimeter. The main force moved down the west side of the road and peeled off to the portion of the perimeter occupied by 2-22 Infantry (M) with only a small force attacking one platoon of Company B, 3-22 Infantry on the east side of the road. Almost simultaneously a heavy attack of RPG's, machine guns and small arms opened up on the southern portion of the perimeter along the road. The heaviest force peeled to the east attacking Company C while a smaller assault element moved to the west toward the element of the 2-22 Infantry (M) on the west side of the road. The attack from the south followed the road, the majority of the attackers moving along the ditches which

paralleled the road on both sides. Within minutes, a large force opened up with RPG's, machine guns, small arms, and grenades at the eastern perimeter, attempting to penetrate the company perimeter. The VC continued to cover their attack with 60mm mortar fire. All US personnel not occupying LP or ambushes were defending from sandbagged bunkers with overhead covers.

Between 0100 to 0230 hours, 105mm Beehive direct fire was requested and fired along Company C perimeter. VC had penetrated a portion of Company C perimeter at approximately 0200 hours. Beehive rounds eliminated penetration except for four (4) VC. From 0230 to 0400 hours, direct fire from 105mm artillery across Company C perimeter, firing Beehive until expended, then firing HE direct. Company A was reinforced by direct fire across its perimeter from 155mm artillery. At 0200 hours, Company A lost radio communications with its 16 element and two (2) or three (3) VC penetrated the perimeter. At 0300 hours, 2 platoons of Company B (reserve) were committed to reinforce and hold Company A perimeter. From 0445 to 0500 hours, Reconnaissance Platoons was committed to reinforce Company C, who had sustained slight penetration. Recon Platoon could not reinforce previous to this because constant direct fire of Beehive rounds prevented any movement in that area. At 0330 hours, one (1) APC from 2-22 Infantry (M) perimeter was moved to reinforce Company C from rear, and a second APC was placed at 0430 hours. Between 0230 hours and 0330 hours, air strikes were placed on area to the southeast in front of Company C perimeter employing both napalm and CBU.

At approximately 0230 hours, Company C ambush reported that 50% of its personnel were casualties. At the time one (1) was KIA from RPG, and several were wounded. In the morning, it was determined that of the 16 men ambush, there had been 1 KIA, 11 WIA from enemy fire and 1 KIA due to the close air support.

Fierce close in fighting continued until approximately 0500 hours, when the VC began to withdraw leaving behind their dead

and wounded. By 0630 hours, the fighting had nearly stopped with only occasional sniper and some automatic weapons fire. Estimated enemy casualties after early morning sweep near perimeter, 105 VC KIA (BC), 2 VC (PW). Undetermined number of VC individual and crew served weapons. US losses, 16 KIA, 99 WIA. The enemy size and units were not determined exactly, however, it was fairly certain that the size of the force was at least a reinforced regiment with elements from the 271st and 272nd VC Regiments positively identified both from documents and PW interrogation

My comments

What this summary doesn't mention is that the enemy did penetrate the wire at Burt, but was forced back by counter attacks and artillery fire using bee hive rounds.

I continued to fly in support of FSB Burt for most of the day on January 2. Mostly medevac and resupply. We had many crews up by that time and late in the day we all flew back to Tay Ninh together. The significance of Burt was that it was one of the first human wave attacks in our area of operation (AO). We had worked much further north in November and December in support of Loc Ninh and Bu Dop. This had been my first experience with what a 105mm bee hive round can do to attacking enemy troops. At Loc Ninh, there were enemy troops nailed to trees by bee hive rounds. Plus the runway was littered with unexploded mortar rounds, just sticking out like arrows. We had to land right in the middle of them. But at Burt, they were bull dozing the enemy into a mass grave with bulldozers, definitely gets a 20 year olds attention.

Our unit the 187th Assault Helicopter Company continued to fly support for the 25th Infantry Division around FSB Burt for the next few days. Most 5 ship lifts and ferrying troops between

Burt and Tay Ninh.

From the 187th AHC Incident Reports

2 Jan 1968 – The Rat Pack gunships killed six Viet Cong when they responded to a call for gunship cover in the early morning hours at Fire Support Base Burt twenty five miles northeast of Tay Ninh. The base had been hit by an enemy mortar attack and a ground attack was underway when the Rat Pack arrived on the scene and disrupted the enemy assault by 2 NVA Regiments. This was the battle of Soui Cut.

5 Jan 1968 – The Blackhawks became involved in a fierce battle with a large NVA force while on short final to an LZ, thirty five mikes northwest of Tay Ninh. Two helicopters were shot down by the heavy enemy automatic weapons fire. One crew member, SP5 Kenneth Scruton was killed. The three remaining crew, Warrant Officer Mercer, Warrant Officer Jordan and SP4 Seitz were down in an enemy infested area for two hours before they were rescued. The only weapon among them was one .45 caliber pistol. The Blackhawks continued the combat assault missions into the hostile area and later that afternoon, they returned for extractions. Again they received heavy enemy resistance. The flight was mortared while shut down at a nearby fire support base. Throughout the day, ten crew members were wounded and eleven aircraft sustained damage from the ballistic assault.

LZ Hourglass

We were scheduled for an insertion of B Company, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division on January 5, 1968. This was not uncommon as the 4/9 “Manchu” usually

requested us when they had a combat assault (CA) to do. To tell this story, I am going to use the commentary of the 4/9 Commander, written almost 40 years later. He describes what is happening to the ground troops and I will add my commentary on what was happening to me and the rest of the 187th AHC.

"MY RECOLLECTIONS"

By: Colonel (Retired) John M. Henschman

4th Battalion CO

Oct. 1, 1967 -March 3, 1968

Background:

The Third Brigade's main base was Dau Tieng. Like our Brigade, they had a forward base at Soui Cut. FSB Burt, They had occupied this position for just a few days. Like us, they were astride a major road and trail network leading to Saigon- On the night of January 1, a reinforced regiment of NVA attacked and did severe damage to the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry.

The MANCHUs were ordered to immediately leave Katum, go OPCON to the Third Brigade, and relieve the 2/22 Infantry. I flew down there at once to meet with the Brigade CO, Colonel Daemes. The position occupied by the 2/22 Infantry, and other areas, were just a mess. Our battalion did better than that in a couple of hours each day.

As the lead elements of the MANCHUs got there, we began to get things organized. By late evening, we were all in, and as Bill and I walked around, we could see immediately that our guys were a whole hell of a lot better soldiers than those that had been there before.

Operations: January 3-4:

Usual stuff. Short sweeps into the immediate area. Some contact. Colonel Daemes wanted us to S&D out farther. He assigned an area for January 5 that was just 1 KM from the Cambodian Border. Because of its hour-glass shape, that is

what we came to call it.

The “Hour Glass” Landing Zone – January 5:

It must be said that this was the most difficult and frustrating day I spent in Vietnam in terms of commanding an “operation”. It was a deadly day for many-way too many. It is so firmly planted in my memory, I can visualize almost every detail and recall vividly some, of the words spoken.

Company A and D were sent off into another A0 to do a sweep, and to be extracted in the late afternoon. It was Company C’s turn to remain in position in FSB BURT. Company B was to go into the Hour-Glass using the lift ships initially used by Company A.

Bill and I had made the decision not to put preparation fires around an LZ – because it invariable brought “Charlie”. The defensive fires were, however, meticulously planned, and available “on call”. I did order SMOKEY in on the east, north, and west sides of this LZ because it could be seen from higher ground in Cambodia, and I knew there were base camps close by. [Hell, you could see the tin covered roofs.]

My Note: The Bill he is referring to is Major William Rousch. He won the DSC on this day, but prior he had multiple awards of the Silver Star and was known as a brave and effective leader. He was the battalion S-3 (Operations) and worked with us often as it was his job to plan the battalion assaults. He lead the team that rescued our downed pilots, which is referred to later on in the narrative. He was well known and respected by the men of the 187th AHC. He earned his second DSC on February 27, 1968, unfortunately, it was a posthumous award.

The pickup zone (PZ) was BURT. I was overhead in the C&C. Bill was with the first lift. The first lift into the LZ landed "cold". That platoon headed off the LZ into the southern wood line per plan. The second lift was just hovering for drop off when several .51 caliber anti-aircraft machine guns swept the flight. The troops were caught in the open. One chopper crashed and burned, killing the pilot and one door gunner. The other crew members lay near the crash badly injured. As I looked down on that horrific sight, I saw Bill STAND UP firing his carbine at those gun emplacements, and then guiding one or two members of the platoon at a time into defiladed positions on the edge of the woods. He did this ten or twelve times until all the platoon was off the LZ. [I later put him in for his first DSC for this heroism above and beyond the call]

My Note: I was flying chalk 9 that day (next to last ship in formation). We went in in two 5 ship formations. The LZ was not big enough for 10 ships. It was shaped like an hour glass as stated earlier. But the dividing restriction came almost together, so we landed in the southern portion, which was the largest. The first flight got in and out no problem, but on the way out they reported seeing troops in the open moving toward the LZ. Upon out approach, they opened up on us just prior to touchdown. We got down and off loaded, but were taking hits and casualties almost immediately. The ship referred to above was hit by and RPG and exploded on take off, he crashed in the northern clearing of the hour glass. So we got off the LZ with 4 ships, one with my tent mate William Preston, wounded in the shoulder, another smoking pretty badly. Chalk 10 (trail, last ship in formation) circled back to try and pick up the downed crew (that's always trail's mission), but the enemy fire was way too heavy, after two

attempts BH6 (Blackhawk 6, Major Joe Burns, 187th Commander) called him off and decided it was safer for the infantry to rescue them. On the trip back to the PZ, the smoking bird lost its engine and made a forced landing, I went in to pick up the crew and take them to the LZ, the ship with Preston continued to Tay Ninh to the nearest medical facility. I returned to the PZ dropped off the downed crew, picked up some infantry and took them out to secure the downed aircraft, then back to the PZ. At FSB Burt, we landed on the road running through the center of the FSB, shutdown to conserve, and waited on the next phase.

What saved that platoon from complete annihilation was that the NVA gunners had AA parapets and could not depress their muzzles much below three feet from the ground giving an infantryman a chance to crawl under it. As soon as the two platoons were in, I had to decide: what next. The two platoons were taking heavy mortar and small arms fire from across the LZ to the north. By now, of course, I was firing everything available around those platoons. I had ISSUE 11 get air in-bound; I had SMOKY continue to make passes until he was too full of holes to continue; I requested and got gun ships two at first, then more. By now it was midmorning. I needed to reinforce the two platoons on the ground because they did not have enough combat power to make it alone. I ordered the next platoon in, but the lift was hit hard by small arms fire, and the LZ was covered with mortar fire. The lift commander chose to abort. Now, my choices were limited. It was obvious that we had landed in the middle of a very sophisticated headquarters, well-defended. I had to reinforce in real strength, or get those two platoons out of there. I asked Colonel Daemes to get Company A and D saddled up wherever they were and get them ready to reinforce. His response: "Let's wait a bit, Henchman, and see what happens here. Maybe we can handle this with what you have here." I waited, and time was **not** in our

favor.

An hour went by-it is almost noon now. Some of B Company's guys had rescued and secured the rest of the, shot-down crew. The troops in the wood line had dug in, Bill and I were in constant contact. Their situation was precarious. But I needed more people on the ground, or needed to get those two platoons OUT! Meantime, I had more and more firepower allocated. At about 1300, I had one SMOKY; three Cav LOH doing recon; TWELVE gunships sort of going in a big circle delivering ordnance, jets were making continuous bombing runs with GPs, 20mm, and clusters; and I had priority of Division fires that could reach this area-which was basically Daemes DS Arty battalion at BURT. Again, I told him we should reinforce with the whole battalion. something very big – a division headquarters? COSVN? His response: "I can't do that. We can't afford to let BURT be that undefended." I was furious. If I could have gotten TROPIC 6 on the line, I would have. He was not available to me on the net I had in the chopper.

About 1330 – 1400, one of the Cav LOH saw a bunch of weapons near positions that looked abandoned on the ground in the woods just west of the LZ. Daemes ordered me to put one platoon of Company A in there to get them. I set that up very reluctantly. While this activity was going on, the battalion net was flooded with some phony Australian claiming to be operating in our A0, and all this fire was dangerous to his operation. I needed to stop it. **No way!** We did some triangularization on him with the choppers, and bombed him harder because he was transmitting from Cambodia. Later, I was chastised about responding on the battalion "Push" by Communication Security guys, but as I explained, they knew all our frequencies and, besides,, I was in full control on my alternate frequency.

My Note: During this waiting period, FSB Burt was hit with a heavy mortar attack. I was sitting in the back of my helicopter trying to eat some C's when it started. I was wearing an old uniform shirt my father-in-law had given me, it had metal buttons on it. I immediately started looking for somewhere to hide, and saw nothing. We were beside a bunker but only the small forward facing gun slit was toward us, the larger door was in the back. I didn't care I just reacted. I hit that slit head first and full speed, and since I was a skinny guy then, I made it through. It took all the buttons off the front of that shirt, everyone of them, all down the front and both pockets. They walked the mortars through the artillery area which was adjacent to the road and where we were parked. Luckily only minor damage to any helicopter, but they flattened the tires on a few artillery pieces, so the gun crew was hollering for us to get out of the bunker and help them muscle the gun into the correct firing azimuth. So I got out and helped them get into firing position. Then as they started firing, I went to the gun master and asked to put the lanyard, so he let me fire off about 3 rounds. At least I felt like I was doing something.

When the A company platoon got on the ground west of the LZ, "hot" of course, it turned out that this was just a trap. I spent the next two hours, and lost a couple more choppers getting them out in one piece with only a couple WIA's.

My Note: While loading up for this sortie, one of the 2nd Lt for the infantry, got on my helicopter and proceeded to shoot himself in the foot. It went through and into the aircraft floorboard, but did not penetrate the fuel cell. I radioed

the lead and asked what to do, did he want me to medevac the guy. The infantry CO came back and said "Hell No, kick him off and let the medic there take care of him, he needed troops in the LZ". So off he went and we departed for the next insertion. On this lift, I was trail (Chalk 5), we made the insertion into a hot LZ, then on departure there was some wounded infantry, hit on the initial insertion, so I waited to get them on board. Mortar rounds going off all around me, kicking dirt up on my windshield, just knew I was taking a ton of round into the copter. Got loaded, took off, back to Burt, no wounded that couldn't be handled at the medical facility there. Upon inspection, could not find any holes, we had come through all that unblemished. During the attempts to extract the ground troops, a couple of more helicopters were shot up. Our company, or the remainder of our company went to another base to refuel. We had to take turns as there was only 2 or 3 points, so it was slow. After refueling, we lined up on the runway and checked aircraft, this reduced us even more as a couple found damage that made them unsafe to fly. By this time we were down to 6 or so slicks, even though the company had sent us what they had available as replacements throughout the day.

It was about this time that the C&C was hit by a lot of ground fire, the pilot [the BLACKHAWKS C.O.] told me we were "going down". My RT0 said the engine was on fire. We crash landed into an open field about 2 KM from the Hour Glass, and all of us were picked up almost immediately by Colonel Daemes in his C&C. Only now his C&C was so overloaded that we had to go back to BURT to unload. Soon as I got to BURT, I got into a slick-only thing available-and was back in about 30 minutes. Only, I did not have the good communications afforded by the C&C. It was getting along toward 1600. Two platoons of Company B were still in the tree line, getting hit with all sorts of fire. Since it was obvious I could not reinforce, I

concentrated on getting these guys out. The first lift of slicks came in about 1630, took lots of fire, and the LZ was covered with mortar fire, but they made it out-just barely.

My Note: So two platoons, that means two sorties into a hot LZ with our 5 ships, 30 guys at a time. We made those two sorties, both under fire into and out of a hot LZ, receiving fire from all around. Land, let them load, make sure their all aboard, then take off over the enemy guns. The standard load is 6 combat equipped troops for a UH-1D model, a UH-1H model can take more, but we had D's. If you can't take a load, you kick one off, he then goes to the next ship in line, and they try to take him, etc. The first trip out I ended up with 8 troops, luckily I had a good ship and plenty of LZ room to make a running take-off, cleared the trees and headed for the PZ. I let the flight know that on the next trip they needed to try harder, wasn't sure I could handle another 8. So on the second lift, I ended up with 8 again, same process. That aircraft was 929 and it probably was the strongest aircraft in the unit, thank goodness. We attempted another lift to get the remaining troops out, but the enemy fire was the most intense I can ever remember. Small-arms, coupled with .51 cal, and mortars who had the LZ registered, its was hell. We did make it in, but the troops weren't organized and we couldn't wait, so out we came.

That left Hector Colon's platoon in the tree line, some dead, some wounded. All critically low on ammunition, and darkness only a little way off. If they could not be out before dark, that platoon would have been lost in the night. They did not have the combat power to survive. BLACKHAWK 6 and ships from the 187 Assault Helicopter Company rallied to the cause, got a

few birds without holes together. I had made a very low level pass with the slick I was in and pushed out several cases of ammunition to Hector. It wasn't much, but it was all I had. I recall giving what encouragement I could, ending with: "God bless you, Hector, and KEEP UP THE FIRE. We will move heaven and earth to get you out of this." First try was no good. Flight aborted. Too much fire. Second try, Hector had his guys ready, carrying their dead and wounded, and got them on the choppers which took off immediately as loaded. Only problem was, two took off without a full load, leaving the last slick with a crew of 4, seven dead and four wounded, a total of 15 for a slick designed to pull out with a maximum load of 11. I literally willed that slick to fly. It barely made it over the tree line, and barely made it to BURT. What Hector's guys did, individually and collectively, was gallantry in action. NO soldiers ever did better for each other. I put the entire platoon in for decorations for heroism. Some, sad to say, were posthumous. From that day to this, my respect for those MANCHUs is immense.

But the effects of that day were, not over:

The support helicopter companies were severely damaged. Three had been shot down' and burned somewhere, including the C&C I had been riding. They had quite a few WLA's among their crews, and most of the slicks needed lots of holes patched. I was visited by the Communications Security guys from MACV who chewed my ass for communicating with the enemy on my net

My Note:

This is where things started to go sour, at least in my estimation. It had already been a bad day and as far as our 'prestige' as a unit, was about to get worse. We had made repeated insertions and/or extractions from a hot LZ. Had multiple crew members wounded and lost numerous aircraft. But

we had attempted to complete every mission given to us. After the attempt to extract the final platoon, we went back to the refuel point. We would wait here while they softened up the area with air strikes, artillery, and gunships. To give the guns priority on refueling, we lined up on the side of the runway and started to shut down. The plan was after the guns refueled to crank up in by twos and hover over to refuel. But as the first gun got topped off and was taking off, his blades stuck the blades of the lead aircraft as it was shutting down. Lucky for the crews it only stuck the first few inches of each blade, knocking off the blade tip cap on each aircraft. But in the rotary wing world this is very bad, causes an unbalanced rotor and severe vibrations, so both aircraft are grounded. I watched it happen and couldn't believe it.

Now confusion started to reign supreme. There started to be a crew shuffle, lead had lost his aircraft, so he was transferring to another, some crew had had enough and others still wanted to go back in, so there was lots of shuffling. During all this, flight lead forgot about refueling, which would become the most critical factor of the day. Black Baron 6 (269th Aviation Battalion CO) had taken over as Air Mission Commander, so BH6, Maj Burns came down to lead the flight into the LZ. This act stayed with me for the rest of my Army career. Maj Burns did not have to lead the flight, the C&C usually stayed above the fray directing traffic and monitoring the action. He had already been shot down once that day and came back for more. But here he was, not asking his troops to do anything he won't do, and demonstrating that to us all. I talked to Joe Burns about this years later, he said the hardest part of being a Commander, was constantly worrying that you were making a decision that would get others killed or injured, it never left your mind.

BB6 had ordered in additional aircraft from our sister unit the 116th AHC (Hornets) and they were in the vicinity, but this was our show and we were determined to complete it. So we

boarded our 5 remaining aircraft with the volunteer crews, cranked up and got ready for the extraction. Did I mention, lead forgot to get us refueled? Well upon cranking and reporting in we discovered, we did not have enough fuel to get to the LZ, and back to the PZ, without being in a fuel critical state. Maj Burns wanted BB6 to give us time to refuel, but he didn't want to wait and ordered the Hornet ships in for the pickup. His decision was correct, the platoon needed to be extracted as soon as possible and not placed in anymore danger due to our stupidity. But it was painful to have to let another unit finish our day for us. It wasn't about bravery or courage, it was about unit pride and wanting to finish what we started. Plus it was about how we felt towards our comrades in the Manchu's. I was a sad flight home for us. We were happy they got the infantry out, but it would have been a lot sweeter if **WE** had gotten the infantry out.

By miracle of miracles, I actually finished the day without a hole in my aircraft, I think I was one of the only ones that escaped damage that day. The Manchu's used our Officers Club at Tay Ninh and one of the stories they told later about this battle, is that while the last platoon was awaiting pickup, they were down to almost no ammo. In one group all were dead or wounded but one PFC, they gave him all their ammo and grenades. He continued to keep the NVA at bay and when he got down to his last clip, stood up and charged the NVA position, firing all the way. The NVA broke and ran, he returned to his group, helped load the dead and wounded and was extracted. I wish the Manchu CO had posted some figures, but my fading memory recollects that of the last 30 guys in the LZ 16 were killed or wounded.

269th Aviation Battalion Logs

DAILY STAFF JOURNAL OF DUTY OFFICER'S LOG		DATE		TIME	
Duty Officer's Name & Detail Section		Duty Officer's Name		Duty Officer's Name	
2025 Oct 04		2025 Oct 04		2025 Oct 04	
1	0501	0501	0501	0501	0501
2	0502	0502	0502	0502	0502
3	0503	0503	0503	0503	0503
4	0504	0504	0504	0504	0504
5	0505	0505	0505	0505	0505
6	0506	0506	0506	0506	0506
7	0507	0507	0507	0507	0507
8	0508	0508	0508	0508	0508
9	0509	0509	0509	0509	0509
10	0510	0510	0510	0510	0510
11	0511	0511	0511	0511	0511
12	0512	0512	0512	0512	0512
13	0513	0513	0513	0513	0513
14	0514	0514	0514	0514	0514
15	0515	0515	0515	0515	0515
16	0516	0516	0516	0516	0516
17	0517	0517	0517	0517	0517
18	0518	0518	0518	0518	0518
19	0519	0519	0519	0519	0519
20	0520	0520	0520	0520	0520
21	0521	0521	0521	0521	0521
22	0522	0522	0522	0522	0522
23	0523	0523	0523	0523	0523
24	0524	0524	0524	0524	0524
25	0525	0525	0525	0525	0525
26	0526	0526	0526	0526	0526
27	0527	0527	0527	0527	0527
28	0528	0528	0528	0528	0528
29	0529	0529	0529	0529	0529
30	0530	0530	0530	0530	0530

DAILY STAFF JOURNAL OF DUTY OFFICER'S LOG		DATE		TIME	
Duty Officer's Name & Detail Section		Duty Officer's Name		Duty Officer's Name	
2025 Oct 05		2025 Oct 05		2025 Oct 05	
1	0601	0601	0601	0601	0601
2	0602	0602	0602	0602	0602
3	0603	0603	0603	0603	0603
4	0604	0604	0604	0604	0604
5	0605	0605	0605	0605	0605
6	0606	0606	0606	0606	0606
7	0607	0607	0607	0607	0607
8	0608	0608	0608	0608	0608
9	0609	0609	0609	0609	0609
10	0610	0610	0610	0610	0610
11	0611	0611	0611	0611	0611
12	0612	0612	0612	0612	0612
13	0613	0613	0613	0613	0613
14	0614	0614	0614	0614	0614
15	0615	0615	0615	0615	0615
16	0616	0616	0616	0616	0616
17	0617	0617	0617	0617	0617
18	0618	0618	0618	0618	0618
19	0619	0619	0619	0619	0619
20	0620	0620	0620	0620	0620
21	0621	0621	0621	0621	0621
22	0622	0622	0622	0622	0622
23	0623	0623	0623	0623	0623
24	0624	0624	0624	0624	0624
25	0625	0625	0625	0625	0625
26	0626	0626	0626	0626	0626
27	0627	0627	0627	0627	0627
28	0628	0628	0628	0628	0628
29	0629	0629	0629	0629	0629
30	0630	0630	0630	0630	0630

DAILY STAFF JOURNAL OF DUTY OFFICER'S LOG		DATE		TIME	
Duty Officer's Name & Detail Section		Duty Officer's Name		Duty Officer's Name	
2025 Oct 06		2025 Oct 06		2025 Oct 06	
1	0701	0701	0701	0701	0701
2	0702	0702	0702	0702	0702
3	0703	0703	0703	0703	0703
4	0704	0704	0704	0704	0704
5	0705	0705	0705	0705	0705
6	0706	0706	0706	0706	0706
7	0707	0707	0707	0707	0707
8	0708	0708	0708	0708	0708
9	0709	0709	0709	0709	0709
10	0710	0710	0710	0710	0710
11	0711	0711	0711	0711	0711
12	0712	0712	0712	0712	0712
13	0713	0713	0713	0713	0713
14	0714	0714	0714	0714	0714
15	0715	0715	0715	0715	0715
16	0716	0716	0716	0716	0716
17	0717	0717	0717	0717	0717
18	0718	0718	0718	0718	0718
19	0719	0719	0719	0719	0719
20	0720	0720	0720	0720	0720
21	0721	0721	0721	0721	0721
22	0722	0722	0722	0722	0722
23	0723	0723	0723	0723	0723
24	0724	0724	0724	0724	0724
25	0725	0725	0725	0725	0725
26	0726	0726	0726	0726	0726
27	0727	0727	0727	0727	0727
28	0728	0728	0728	0728	0728
29	0729	0729	0729	0729	0729
30	0730	0730	0730	0730	0730

Links to Other Stories About This Action

[Telling the Story](#) – by one of the infantry in B/4/9

[The Hour Glass](#) – by LTC Henschman

[Battle of FSB Burt](#) – 2/22 Website

[FSB Burt](#) – Wayne “Crash” Coe, 187th AHC

Black Virgin Mountain (Nui Ba Den)



The Black Virgin Mountain (Nui Ba Den) rose from the rice paddies just a few miles from Tay Ninh. Tay Ninh airfield elevation was about 200 feet above sea level and Nui Ba Den rose to around 4000 feet. It was as if someone had just placed this mountain out in the middle of the delta.

It was great for returning pilots, because if you had any visibility, just fly toward the only mountain for miles around and you'd get home. Of course, during bad weather and no or limited visibility, it could really cause your "pucker factor" to increase, since you knew it was out there and couldn't see it.

Tay Ninh and the airfield were located a few miles from the base, a Special Forces radio relay site on top, guarded by Mong CIDG forces, and lots of VC in between. The mountain was riddled with caves to hide the bad guys.

The Mountain and I had a few run-ins. Early in my career as a new Aircraft Commander (AC) I was running some single ship re-supply missions for the Special Forces out of Tay Ninh City. We had been resupplying SF camps all around the Tay Ninh area and had made a couple of runs into Nui Ba Den already that day. As the day wore on, we had a couple of loads to complete. I eyeballed the remaining supplies to the mountain and decided

we could haul it all in one trip rather than divide it between two. My desire to get finished with a long day of flying and save maybe an hour, was an error that was costly. We loaded about 70-80 cases of soda and beer on board, along with a few other supplies and headed for the mountain. My crew that day was CW2 Frank Kurinec, pilot, SP4 Hudec, gunner, and SP5 Jorgensen, CE. I had made all the runs up to the mountain that day, so Kurinec wanted a shot at this one. I should have known I was in trouble during the take off, we used a lot of runway and bumped our skids once. I reasoned that we would burn off enough fuel en-route to lighten the landing gross weight. Unfortunately, I forgot to compute in the increased altitude of the landing site in my mental computations.



The flight to the mountain was uneventful and on approach, Frank decided to demonstrate how they did mountain landings in Puerto Rico where he had flown prior to Vietnam. That sounded fine to me, Frank was a CW2 with more non-combat experience than me, so I was up for learning something.

Unfortunately what I would learn would be expensive. Frank came into the landing pad shallow, a no-no for mountain flying and with the already overloaded aircraft, as they say, we ran

out of “pitch, power, and ideas” all at the same time. As the aircraft lost power, we settled behind a conex between us and the landing pad. Knowing we weren’t going to make it, I took the controls and tried to abort the landing to the left, down the mountain slope. I lowered the cyclic to reduce the pitch and attempt to get rotor rpm back, but before we could completely recover, the blades contact the upslope of the mountain. The aircraft rolled over to the left and made a couple of complete revolutions, coming to rest upright, just a few feet from a 200-300 foot shear drop off. Sodas and beer were scattered everywhere. So were the CIDG troops stationed on the mountain, not trying to rescue us, but to retrieve the sodas and beer.

I knew I was alive when I saw Frank’s butt headed up the side of the mountain, scrambling on all fours. After a few feet, he stopped and came back to assist the rest of the crew in getting out. Hudec was thrown clear, I was still strapped in, and Jorgie was hanging out the left side by his monkey harness. He was the only one with any injury, a sprained ankle from being thrown around during the roll-over.





The SF and radio guys came out to help us, make sure we were alright, and to make sure they secured their share of the soda and beer. We pulled out the radios and sensitive equipment and sit down to wait on someone to pick us up. The aircraft was totally destroyed. One of our sister ships came in about an hour later and evacuated us from the top of the mountain. The aircraft hulk was retrieved the next day and brought back to Tay Ninh for salvage.



This is a photograph of the aftermath of some bad decision making that day. Aircraft 829 was a great aircraft. Originally named "Gook Spook", I had renamed it "Super Huey" when I was made Aircraft Commander (AC). It was also the aircraft I was flying on August 7, 1967, when we lost a large number of aircraft shot down.

August 7, 1967 – After Action Report

Documentation provided by Wayne "Crash" Coe
with help from Robert N. Gibeault

Note from Robert N. Gibeault

We are preparing to write the definitive story of the Ni Binh battle. I have interviewed E-4's to general officers and have photo's taken during the event. I am looking to interview any people that were involved that day, especially 'Rat Pack' crews, as they were not listed in the 'Bauman Report'. I was wondering if you could create a hypertext link from the 'report' to my E-mail address. We hope to complete the project in the near future and will keep you posted.

Table with multiple sections containing small tables and text. Includes a large text block with a vertical title 'Satz 1.1' and several smaller tables below it.

August 7, 1967– Battle of Ni Binh

August 7, 1967 was a monumental day for me. I had been “in country” for less than 30 days and had not yet been into a “hot” LZ under enemy fire. This day would change that and change it drastically. Posted here are stories of my day, as well as stories from others who participated in that eventual day. The originals are posted on the Blackhawk/Crusader web site <http://www.187thahc.net>

Others have written about this day in other places on the 187th Net. Check out the after action report on the Crusader page, this has some actual details. I am still trying to write mine from a memory fogged over by 30 years of trying only to remember the good things. What I write here is what I remember seeing and feeling that day.

At 1200 hours, 7 August 1967, the 187th Assault Helicopter Company was released by the 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division after conducting combat assaults. The company was to assume II FF Ready Reaction Force. On departing Fire Support Base Martha, the Air Mission Commander, Blackhawk 6, was notified by radio that he and his company were to report to the 4th Battalion, 12th Infantry, 199th Light Infantry Brigade. Blackhawk 6 reported to Thu Douc at 1230 hours to receive a briefing by a representative of the Battalion's S-3 section. During this briefing, the concept of

operation was explained, the locations of the pickup and landing zones given, and the estimate of one possible VC squad in the area was given. Blackhawk 6 asked about suppression and was told that there would be no preparation or suppression because friendlies were assumed to be there. Blackhawk 6 then went to the PZ to await the arrival of the rest of the company which landed at approximately 1300 hours. He then briefed the platoon leaders of the two airlift platoons and the gun platoon before returning to Thu Douc to pick up the command and control party, When they were aboard his aircraft, he took off, headed for the LZ, and called the lift ships out of the PZ.

Enroute to the LZ, the gun platoon leader, Rat Pack 6, Called Blackhawk 6 to inform him that there were numerous people on the ground near the LZ and that he saw numerous sampans loaded with people. Rat Pack 6 was approximately two minutes ahead of the C&C ship at this time. Blackhawk 6 then reported these observations to the Air Mobile Force Commander, Valiant Knight 6, said that there was no restriction on the civilians in the area from using the canals and that the people were probably friendlies. Valiant Knight 6 again specified that there would be no preparation or suppression. Rat Pack 6 had made a low pass over the area in the meantime and had observed people in camouflaged uniforms. He then asked Blackhawk 6 if there were ARVN's in the area. This was relayed to Valiant Knight 6, but no answer was received from him. At this time eight lift ships were on one-half mile final to the LZ. Blackhawk 6 then reminded the flight to have visors down, harness locked, and to use negative suppression unless fired upon.



On very short final, chalk two (AC W0 James R. Conde, PP Robert J. McMorine) reported, "Chalk two, receiving fire from three o'clock." Almost simultaneously, all the aircraft reported receiving fire from all directions. The Rat Pack was on position to cover the flight and immediately began to fire rockets, mini guns , and 40 mm grenades into the area along the north and south side of the LZ. The lead helicopter began to depart the area immediately after letting off the troops. Chalks two and Four (AC W0 Robert W. Seay, PP W0 Samuel E. Jones) did not land but aborted with wounded aboard and went to Hotel 3. As the flight was departing the LZ, Chalk six, LT. Connelly, in aircraft 66-934, reported that his aircraft was badly hit and that he would have to land , then, almost immediately, he reported engine failure and entered autorotation at which time he also suffered the loss of hydraulics, His autorotation was successful into the nearest open area. Chalk seven , LT. Eshelman, followed his ship down and evacuated the crew, weapons, and radios. Chalk seven had been unable to land in the LZ, so he left his seven troops as a security force. However, in his rush to help get the crew

out of the downed ship, one US enlisted man from the seven aboard LT. Eshelman's ship was hit on the head by the still turning rotor blade of 66-934. He was evacuated along with the downed crew and the mortally wounded infantry company commander. Thus, Chalks one, three, five, six, and eight landed in the LZ and unloaded troops. Chalk Two, aircraft 66-854, had diverted to Hotel 3 with the pilot wounded in the elbow followed by Chalk four, aircraft 66-922, with two wounded infantry men aboard and numerous bullet holes in the ship. Chalk seven had departed for the 24th Surgical Hospital with five wounded aboard. Chalks one, three, five, and eight returned to the PZ. All eight aircraft had received hits but had remained in the LZ long enough to evacuate the wounded from the first lift. Chalk eight shut down in the PZ to assess damage. At this time, a message was received at Tay Ninh that aircraft were hit, aircrews were wounded, and more lift ships would be needed. The last remaining flyable aircraft was immediately dispatched to the operational area.

Capt. Presson was then directed by Blackhawk 6 to bring in the second lift and that no fire was being received in the LZ. The second flight brought in along a route further south than the original route, but the LZ was the same. Again, on short final, all ships were suppressing along the right side of the formation. All four helicopters were hit, but no crew members received wounds. As the flight came out of the LZ, Chalk 4, Capt. Wagner in ship 66-932, reported that he was losing power. He set his aircraft down approximately 1000 meters southwest of the LZ. Chalk 1, Capt. Presson, went down with him to extract the crew, weapons, and radios. As he neared touchdown his ship's tail rotor drive shaft was severed by automatic weapons fire from the left. The aircraft, 66-819, spun to the right and crash landed, but no personnel were injured. Chalk Two, WO Britt, then came in to extract the crews, radios and weapons of both downed ships. In the meantime, Chalk three, aircraft 64-13817, was hit again coming out of the LZ, Chalk 3 (AC WO Wayne R. Coe PP WO David

Webster), lost the complete tail rotor and cyclic control, the ship spun violently toward the ground. WO Coe, the Aircraft Commander, rolled off the throttle and lowered pitch. This action slowed the spin. At the last minute, he rolled on throttle and pulled pitch. This action slowed the spin and cushioned the impact. Three crew members were injured but not seriously. The fourth was unscratched. This crew was evacuated by an aircraft from the 118th AHC, Thunderbirds, whose crew had witnessed the crash. Aircraft 64-131817 had been shot down by 50 caliber fire and was totally destroyed by fire.

At this time, Blackhawk 6 received a report that an aircraft from the 68th AHC Top Tigers had been hit and had been destroyed in the LZ. He turned back to the LZ to see what had happened as the Top Tiger Ship had not called the C&C ship before entering the LZ. He apparently had been cleared by someone on the ground and had been informed that the area was secure. His approach terminated within fifty meters of an automatic weapons position. The enemy gunners waited until the ship was very close to termination and then raked the cockpit with fire killing one aviator.

After we dropped our downed crews off at the 97th Evac in Bien Hoa, we returned to the PZ to see what was up. Well not much was, when we got there I think there were 2 or three other birds left flyable. A Tac 'E' or Tactical Emergency had been called, that meant that every available aircraft in the area would be converging on this spot shortly. Already, extra guns were coming in and reporting to Rat6.

We shut down to check for damage. We had been very fortunate, took only a couple of rounds, unfortunately one had clipped our engine ignition wires. This wire carries a lot of voltage to the engine igniters during start to get the fire going and is heavily shielded. The CE repaired it the best he could and we decided to try a start. We got the aircraft started, but melted the repair job, so this would be our last start of the day. We would need to keep it running from now on or leave it

where we shut it down.

As explained by the [After Action report](#), Blackhawk crews and aircraft were down everywhere, so we got back into the air to see if we could help. 1LT Charles Eshelman the A/C reported to Blackhawk 6 and asked for instructions.

Just prior to our getting airborne, the Top Tiger aircraft mentioned above had attempted to land in the LZ and was decimated by small arms fire. Reports varied but at least one crew member was dead and others wounded. He had been told by the ground forces that they were receiving no fire, which was true, the enemy was waiting for more aircraft, they were much easier targets.

As we got airborne we were able to listen to the rescue attempts to get the Top Tiger crew out. I am not sure I have the order correct, but there were at least 3 attempts to get the crew out, all unsuccessful. I remember thinking "those guys have got to have big balls, everything that gets close is hit and crews are wounded". Little did I imagine what was coming.

The first attempt was Smoky, our battalion smoke ship. A smoke ship injects oil into the exhaust to produce a heavy smoke screen between the tree line and the landing aircraft. It's great and most slick pilots love it. I have never been hit when Smoky was along. Shot at yes, hit no. Anyway, Smokey made the first attempt and on short final the LZ erupted. Smokey's CE was wounded and he had to abort and head for the 3rd Evac in Saigon.

Next was a Razorback gunship. As I was to learn later this wasn't a good idea in its own right. Gunships are typically heavy and have a hard time taking off on a runway, much less a hot LZ. But the Razorback crew was low on ammo and fuel and decided to try. On short final he was plummeted by small arms fire, his CE was wounded in the neck and a rocket pod was hit

and caught on fire. He tried to jettison, but it hung and the other CE had to kick it off. He headed to 3rd Evac, Saigon.

From the After Action Report: The gun teams immediately hit the north side of the LZ. Initially, we heard that one of the Top Tiger crewmen was wounded and that three were killed. This was later revised to one WIA, one KIA, and two uninjured. The Black Baron smoke ship, Smoky, flown by Capt. Kambrod, volunteered to try to pick up the wounded crew member. As Smoky approached the LZ, he was hit by intense automatic weapons fire and both the gunner and crew chief were wounded in spite of gunship cover. He departed the area to get medical treatment for his wounded. Razorback 35 Capt. Conner, then tried to get in to the LZ while being covered by Razorback 36. He received intense automatic weapons fire and his gunner was hit in the neck. His ship was badly hit and the right rocket pod began to burn. The aircraft commander then jettisoned his rocket pods and departed the LZ to the north. Blackhawk 6 told him to turn left away from the heavy fire, which he did. Razorback 35 then made a forced landing near a Popular Forces Camp near the LZ at coordinates XT 801061. Blackhawk 2 who had volunteered to go into the LZ if needed, followed Razorback 35 down and evacuated the crew chief to the 12th Evacuation Hospital at Cu Chi.

Now the CO of the 199th, a 1 star (BG) decides they can make an attempt. They are low on fuel and need to go back and refuel, so one more try to get the crew out first. He has an aircraft full of staff monitoring the battle. So in they go, or almost... On short final the VC rake the aircraft, the General and one aide are wounded, they abort and head for the hospital... this is starting to get real serious. I think they also went in without permission from Blackhawk 6 the air mission commander. I know he was steamed on the radio.

About now, Blackhawk 6 orders everyone else to stay out of the LZ, no more attempts. You have to understand how hard this is, for one aviator to leave others behind in an LZ. Also, we

have been listening to all this on the radio and actually got to see the Razorback attempt from high above.

Well about this time Eshelmann comes on the intercom and lets us know he thinks he can get into the LZ. He has been watching and has a plan to keep us out of the firing line until we are in the LZ, with a quick pickup, we could be out before they had time to get a bead on us. He isn't going to volunteer unless the crew agrees. So we take a vote. The two crewmembers say go, they're even upbeat about it. To be honest if one of them had of said NO, I probably would have joined him, but since I would have been the lone NO, I agreed also.

So Eschelma calls Blackhawk 6 and starts discussing the plan. BH 6 isn't in favor of risking another crew, but Eshelma does have a good plan. Low level down the river, Rat6 suppress the area heavily in coordination with our approach. They should be hitting the tree line while we are on short final. This will keep the bad guys down and we have a better chance of getting in. Pop up over the LZ, drop it in, pick up the crew, and de de outta there. A good simple plan. BH 6 agrees to allow the try and so we all got ready. Eshelma wasn't a big talker, he was a quiet guy and continued to be a quiet guy for the remainder of his tour. He assigned me the job of all the radio work. I was to coordinate with BH6, Rat 6, and the ground guys. He actually turned his radios off so he could concentrate on flying and directing the 2 guys in back. Then this didn't seem like a lot, but as I would learn later, to trust a 20 day wonder who you had never flown with to coordinating all that radio traffic, was a leap in faith, especially at this crucial time.

I don't remember much about the approach to the LZ. I was talking to Rat6 for reports on the enemy and BH6 was giving him our location so he could coordinate the prep and covering fire. I do remember the pop up into the LZ, the short final, landing, and departure. Since I wasn't flying, I had a lot of free time on my hands, in between yelling over the radio and

at the ground guys to load the wounded crew, I got to look around a lot. These were the longest minutes of my life, 30-60 seconds on short final, few minutes in the LZ (seemed like an hour), and a minute or two to clear the LZ and the fire. These are minutes that are etched in my mind, the images and details of each second and sub-second will always be there.

As I said before, we came in low level and flared just after clearing the tree line, Rat6 and his gun escort had been prepping the LZ prior to us and continued to hit them while we were in the LZ, although he warned us they were running low on ammo, so hurry...

We started receiving heavy fire as soon as we cleared the tree line around the LZ, we were in a flare to lose airspeed and so most of the hits were in the belly. As we dropped into the LZ we could see people scurrying everywhere, good guys and bad guys, it was a sight. The enemy were concentrating fire on the crew, since they were the ones causing the most casualties. Most of the fire and return fire was on our final approach, but it was continuous and loud. As soon as we flared we started taking small arms fire. You could feel it hit the ship, I swear if you hit a UH-1 with a BB gun, you could feel it, every single round. Eshelman was flying and I was following on the controls, SOP for a hot LZ. He shouted at Peniska (the gunner, on my side) that there was enemy running around on that side of the aircraft. I took a look out the the cargo door (I said I was green) and could see people in uniforms and with packs running from the tree line. Peniska was firing his M-60 with one hand and his M-16 with the other (TINS, I swear to God) and you could see them going down, I don't know if it was from being hit or just to find cover. I couldn't see Mineart (CE), but I am sure he was doing the same, as he later confirmed. I could see troops in a ditch on the right firing at us and the splashes of bullets hitting around them, but I decided not to look anymore, it was too

unnerving. Besides things were getting busy in the cockpit.

Once we touched down, I radioed the grunts to load the wounded, a Sgt. jumped on the skid by my window to tell me one crewmember was dead and they were loading the wounded, I yelled for him to hurry. The ground guys loaded the live and wounded crew members, plus one of their own on board, my crew wanted to help, but I insisted they stay on their guns. All this time Eshelman was saying "tell me when we're loaded and I will go", he could only hear me and the crew on intercom. He had been directing fire and letting us know what was going on and what to expect as we went in and sat there, he was cool and calm, at least from outward appearance and in comparison to me, I was yelling at everybody, I didn't even need a radio to be heard. The crew just kept firing, the amount of fire and noise was tremendous. In front of us there was a sniper in a tree, I kept pointing to him in hopes the infantry would see him and fire, but they didn't understand. I saw him fire twice, but apparently he was a bad sniper because we didn't take any rounds in the cockpit, or he was shooting at the grunts.

In the short time we had been on final and in the LZ I had gotten my eyes and ears full! Seen enemy troops running and firing at us, seen them go down, seen two extremely brave gunners sitting in a totally open area engage enemy gunners in one-on-one duels and win. From that day on I would have great respect for the gunners and these two Sp4 Mineart and Sp4 Peniska in particular. Eshelman's calm and focus on mission was also very impressive, it was completely opposite of my energized and emotionally charged antics. I was yelling instructions to the grunts, over the radio, to the crew, you name it I was telling everybody who to shoot, who to load, and to hurry up about it... don't believe any of them heard or understood me. When we were loaded, I gave Eshelman the thumbs up.

As we pulled pitch we again came under intense fire. The fire

had a slack period while we were on the ground. The grass was pretty tall and the gunners were laying down some good suppression, along with the gunships, so 'charlie' was keeping his head down. But as we departed, he had another opportunity to nail us. We had to make a steep exit rather than tuck your nose and go due to the proximity of some tall trees. As we left the LZ area we came under fire by the infamous 12.7mm (.51 cal.) machine gun that had already claimed 2 or 3 aircraft during the day and he nailed us. Not a bad hit, one through the rotor blade. It made the aircraft vibrate so bad, it was difficult to control, so Eshelman put it down in the first secure area we could find, just outside an RF camp.

Another ship came in and evacuated the wounded. We stuck around and got the radios out, packed up our stuff, and examined the ship. I had a camera and have the pictures of 829 with all the bullet holes. One picture in particular tells a story. There are three closely placed rounds right behind where Mineart's head should have been. They look as if someone fired them on the range. The grouping could be covered by a coffee cup. The best we could figure during the time on the ground the ammo belt to Mineart's gun broke and he bent over to link them back together. That's when the three rounds must have hit. There were holes in the partition behind both pilots, around both gunners, and the area aft of the gunners where the doors slide back, they were riddled. So most of the fire was aft of the cockpit, a common occurrence, 'charlie' had trouble understanding the concept of 'leading' an aircraft. The supports holding the seats up were hit, the transmission was hit, the skids were hit, so there was a lot of bullets whizzing through the cargo area, the enemy gunners were definitely trying to stop Mineart and Peniska. Not many in the tail boom, so it was pretty concentrated fire. None of us were hit, we were happy and joking and kidding around, too young and stupid to realize what we had been through and how lucky we were.

We had numerous hits on the aircraft, most around the gunners stations, they had concentrated on them for good reason. Plus we had numerous holes in the transmission, good thing we set down, we weren't going to fly long.



Sp4 Mineart Indicating Bullet Holes Behind Where His Head Was



Pilot's side of the aircraft with numerous bullet holes



Main rotor blade with 12.7mm (50 cal) hole



AC side of aircraft engine deck with numerous bullet holes



Main rotor blade with small arms holes

The CE and gunner had performed beautifully. They had made the bad guys pay and took much of the fire during our short stay. 90% of the hits were in the gunner area. I believe to this day that without their heroic and courageous actions, I would not have survived that day.

Another BH aircraft picked us up and dropped us at Chu Chi. Then we were picked up by Blackjack 6 (BG Seneff) and flown to Tay Ninh. Aircraft 829 was later recovered and sling loaded to Tay Ninh. Her and I were to have more history. She was in maintenance for over 6 weeks. Completely rebuilt from the skids and cabin up. I have a picture of her stripped except for skids and cabin compartment. Then when I made A/C 6 weeks later, she was assigned to me as my bird. She was a strong aircraft and I was always able to take extra troops, a reason I got to fly trail a lot. Unfortunately, I let her strength give me TOO much confidence and I crashed her on Nui Ba Den with a severely overloaded cargo of cokes and beer. That's

another story for later.

We were picked up and moved to Chu Chi and then picked up by Blackjack 6, BG Seneff, 1st Aviation Brigade Commander and flown to Tay Ninh. I have to tell you this was a thrill for a 20 day wonder to be picked up by Black Jack 6, man my life was complete.

Of all the aircraft that started out that day, only one ship returned home with its original crew, they had to be blessed and they were truly brave. You will need to read the other two installments to completely understand this one.

At the next day, we had an impact awards ceremony. BG Seneff was there to present on the spot awards for the actions on August 7. Impact awards are usually presented at a lower level than the recommended award. You are given an impact award and recommended for a higher award, that has to go through channels. Eshelman was recommended for the DSC, the second highest award and given an impact award of SS. I got a Bronze Star with V, eventually upgraded to DFC, as did the other crew members.

I learned a lot for that experience. I started to model Eshelman's behavior in hot situations. Forget the emotion, control it, be calm, take it by the numbers. Your emotions can get you killed, it's not just fear, excitement and anger can get you too. I practiced it for the rest of that tour and the next, and it got me into and out of some really bad places. I learned to appreciate and value the guys in the back. I never took them into a bad place without asking them first. We didn't always agree, but they were always ready to do the right thing. I helped them with the bird at the end of the day, cleaned a few guns too. But mostly I learned that I may not be brave, but I had courage, I could overcome my fears and emotions and at least control them for a period of time and do the right thing. When it was over I could be afraid again or just go get drunk or whatever, but when things were tough, I

could do my job, and do it well.

I went through 9 more months, 2 Purple Hearts and finally evacuated due to wounds in May 1968. I was shot down a total of 4 times, once by a single round, never did I take the amount of fire and hits of August 7. Also had 2 engine failures, 2 major accidents, 2 minor accidents... not bad for a 10 month tour... and as I said, I thought this was normal...

Well now I'm a much older and wiser guy, ha, my wife would argue the wiser part, especially after 2 heart attacks. I know I could go back into that LZ if I had to, but I would do a lot of negotiating first. My life is much more valuable to me now than then and my immortality is not quite as clear as it was then.

Notes from the 187th AHC Incident Reports

7 Aug 1967 – The Blackhawks were called upon to support the 199th Light Infantry Brigade in a combat assault which developed into the fiercest battle in the history of the 187th at that time. Major William F. Bauman flew the command and control aircraft as his flight of UH-1D helicopters descended into the LZ and immediately encountered intense heavy automatic weapons and small arms fire. Four aircraft were immediately hit. More aircraft were requested to arrive on the scene seven miles north of Saigon to assist with the insertions which were to be continued. More insertions into the area were executed and the enemy's ground assault continued to lash at the Blackhawks flight. Several aircraft had been shot down in the LZ. Lieutenant David Eshelman flew into the hot LZ to rescue a downed crew and received heavy automatic weapons fire. He managed to rescue the crew but his aircraft was shot down after departing the LZ. The 187th used 15 helicopters in the action and thirteen of these aircraft

were hit, damaged or destroyed as a result of the intense enemy ground fire. The Blackhawks slept over night in Cu Chi following the battle. **My Note:** A total of 19 helicopters were lost or severally damaged that day, 13 from us and 6 more from other units.

8 Aug 1967 – The Blackhawks assembled in the company area for a spot awards ceremony, Major General George P, Seneff, Commanding General of 1st Aviation Brigade awarded the Silver Star to Major William F. Bauman, Lieutenant Charles D, Eshelman, Captain Jerry T, Wagner, Captain Billis Pfesson and Captain Gerald R Kunde for demonstrations of gallantry in action in the battle of 7 Aug. 1967. This was the largest awards ceremony ever held by the 187th. Five Silver Stars and 23 Distinguished Flying Crosses were awarded.

12 Aug 1967 – The 187th Finally begins combat assault missions after re cooperating from the aircraft shortage suffered following the action of 7 August 1967, They flew assaults for the 1st Infantry Division operating from Phuoc Vinh and Quan Loi.