

Chapter 7 February 1, 1972

SHORT! 164 days and a wakeup.

Early February is still rainy, but starting to lighten up.

I hear explosions near the hooch. We all ran outside to the bunker. As I cleared the door, I see a cobra shooting up the perimeter with high explosive rockets. Charlie has been getting frisky, and starting to harass the perimeter. One of the guard towers took fire the other night. I wasn't on guard. The guys on guard opened up, and it got to be a hot little fight for a bit.

One Huey is on call every night. It is fitted with a huge spotlight called a firefly. It is also equipped with a door gunner operated mini gun. The firefly lifted off when the firefight started. They took fire as well, and managed to kill a couple VC.

With more enemy activity, we are now authorized to keep our assigned weapons in the hooches.



The picture above is a cobra with a minigun working out over the hooch. The minigun fires 3000 rounds a minute. When firing, it sounds like a



very angry, very loud
Briggs and Stratton motor
BAAAAA sound.

At the top is my room in
the hooch. I got the M79

grenade launcher and M16 "off the books". I kept the m79 loaded with buckshot rounds. Ammo for just about any weapon could be gotten from the arms room. A number of guys had sawed off shotguns; one guy even had a Thompson sub machine gun. I got to fire it at our firing range. It was surprisingly heavy. The M79 was kind of useless from a moving helicopter due to its slow velocity, and no tracer. I kept the m79 tied up on strings between sheets of tin that comprised a window opening.

We got shot at going through An Khe pass the other day. Nothing real serious, just a few tracers close by.

Lane Army Airfield is a fairly decent small place. We have barbers, tailors, photographers, and an O club that enlisted personnel can attend.

We also have a hobby shop with photography supplies and a dark room. We have to buy the film at the PX, but we can use out of date printing paper and developer supplies at the hobby shop for free. Many of the pictures I took were in black and white, and developed in the hobby shop.

Since I am on call all of the time I have to let operations know where I am. We have an idea that we may be needed when there are Korean operations going on or a CA (combat assault).

I get to fly to Pleiku on parts runs fairly often. Frequently we go with only one pilot, so I get to fly left seat. The aircraft commander fly's from the right seat. Mom and others have been sending care packages. I sure appreciate the letters and care packages from family and friends. It gets pretty lonely out here. It's nice to here from home.

I share stuff I get from home with Linh. She made some candy to send back. It's made out of sugar, water and cocoanut, Very sweet but good. Sometimes things are easier to get on the street. I mentioned that I needed a new set of nomex gloves. Our supply did not have any. The next day she shows up with a new pair she got on the street.

Feb 28, 72.

There is a parts run to Peiku. Tom wanted to go, and I needed the rest so Tom took the flight. They were crossing Mang Yang pass when all hell broke loose. A convoy was traveling up highway 19 at the same time and Charlie opened up with every thing they had. A loach (Hughs OH6) got hit and landed beside the road. They immediately started taking mortars. The pilot got hit with some shrapnel. Tom spotted a mortar position and called a cobra in on it.



This is a view of the area by Mang Yang Pass. We fly over this on our way from An Son to Pleiku. Note the “dots”. These are the graves of the defeated French soldiers there in 1954.

We have access to mail order electronics through the military PX (post exchange) system. I now have a Cannon camera with a 55mm and a 200mm lens. The only problem is that if you are close enough to take pictures, you probably need to be looking for bad guys and manning your M60 instead of a camera.



We continue to do recoveries. I wish I made a good record of all the calls we responded to. I have my flight records, but no notations on what we did on those flights. I do know that in 6 months of being crew chief we sling loaded 23 Hueys out of the field.

Here Rick is securing the rotor straps preparing for sling load on a recovery.

It was always an adrenalin rush to get a call. Usually in the case of battle damage, the shooting was over when we got there, but you never knew. If the helicopter was in a secure enough, and the damage was minor we would fix it in the field and fly it back, otherwise we would rig it for sling load.



bottom of the Chinook. .

The process of rigging was to tie down the rotor blades and put a heavy nylon strap around the main rotor head for slinging. We would then wait for a CH47 Chinook helicopter to come and pick it up. One of our guys would stand on the top of the Huey with the sling to hook up to the hook on the



When we made radio contact with the Chinook, we would pop a smoke grenade to identify where we wanted them to land. The Chinook crew would call out the color and we would confirm the color to avoid having the enemy also popping smoke to lure someone into a trap.



The 129th assault helicopter company's mission was to provide flight support for the Korean Tiger Division. When on a combat assault, it is necessary for the soldiers to get off the Huey rapidly. We had two instances of Korean soldiers running into tail rotors. This practice was found to be detrimental to soldier and helicopter alike. Two of our recoveries were from head to tail rotor strikes.

Race relations continue to be bad. A bunch of black guys came into the enlisted club with clubs and knives and guns. Shot up the place, wounded one and generally wreaked havoc until the MP's calmed things down. We got word of the commotion, and got our M60's out and mounted on top of our bunker facing towards the center of the compound. I guess the MP's had it under control. In any case we got tired of sitting around out there and put our stuff away and went to bed. Don't know what their problem was, just ticked at the world I guess.



The next day we used Snow Snake to haul 3 guys in hand cuffs to Phu Cat for transportation to Long Binh Jail.

The picture to the left shows the “cobra” line. It was close to our hooch. Just beyond the cobra line is the access road and the perimeter of the

compound. The buildings in the back ground are part of the Korean compound.

We got word that one night a Korean lieutenant was found sleeping on guard. He was woken up and shot on the spot. They don't mess around!

We had an interesting recovery on Wednesday the 23rd. Cpt Billingsly had a chip detector light on a Cobra and decided to make a precautionary landing. A chip detector is a magnet that attracts magnetic particles that could be caused by an engine or transmission coming apart. When particles bridge the contacts a light comes on in the cockpit to warn the crew of possible impending failure.

He landed in a rice paddy with water deep enough to partially cover the rocket pods. We arrived and decided to try and fly it out after checking the chip detectors and finding just a bit of magnetic fuzz. Since it was already in water we would need to lift the water that had infiltrated into the airframe. To make it as light as possible we disarmed it. To do so we had to remove the rockets under water. We removed the minigun and chunker (40mm grenade launcher) ammo as well. We cranked it up and pulled pitch gently to let the water drain out. All went well and we flew it back to base. Cpt Billingsly now has the nickname “Rice Paddy Daddy”.



This is a picture of the Cobra Line. Note the slogan “You Call, We Kill”