

Chapter 11, Hawks Claw.

May 1, 1972 SHORT! 74 days and a wakeup. I'm a double digit midget.

Our company was busy supporting the ROK counter offensives. We received many of our aircraft parts from Camp Holloway at Pleiku.

We took off for Pleiku in Snow Snake II. At the end of our flight line I saw a huge Cobra (the snake not the aircraft) sunning itself. The flight time is just under an hour and Gary Monsees, fairly new at the 129th lets me take the stick after lift off. We climb to about 5000 feet which is out of the range of small arms and head to Camp Holloway. When we get there, Gary took the controls and hovered over to the POL point and I top off the fuel from the large rubber bladders called blivots. We always refuel "hot" with the engine running.

After refueling we moved over to the PSP (pierced steel planking) ramp area and shut down. While we shut down I notice a strange looking Huey and took a picture of it. Promptly one of the gentlemen attending the Huey come over to demand my film and told me to forget what I had seen.

While Gary went in to get our parts, I hung out at Snow Snake which was right beside the runway. I don't know how long the runway was since runway length was not a consideration for the Hueys. The NVA were attacking north around Dak To, Kontum, and Tan Canh. There was some evacuation as well as re-supply of the Pleiku area done with C130 aircraft. I watched this C130 come



barreling past, go off the psp (pierced steel planking) runway, into the dirt and over the hill. I thought sure that I would see a ball of smoke when it crashed, but eventually it climbed up out of the valley and went on it's way.

The Huey I had seen was a NUH-1B, one of 2 that had arrived at Camp Holloway on April 29th. What made it look unusual was the Hawks

Claw XM26 armament subsystem that fired a tube launched optically tracked (TOW) wire guided anti tank missile. They normally flew at 3000 feet above the ground and engaged targets at a slant range distance of 3000 meters. One of the threats facing the defenders in the area was the T54 Russian tank. They

could sometimes be disabled with an M72 shoulder fired LAW (light anti tank weapon), but the shooter had to be perilously close to engage the tank. In the battle of Kontum, the 2 aircraft destroyed 24 Tanks. Only one of the TOW aircraft went out at a time. It was escorted by 2 AH-1G gun ships and a UH-1H command and control aircraft. There was a standing order to destroy the system if one of the aircraft went down to prevent it from falling into enemy hands.



The following is an excerpt from an excellent web site by Jack Heslin on the Battle of Kontum.

On May 12th while conducting visual reconnaissance, one of the Cav light observation helicopters (LOH or loach) piloted by Lt Smith, following some tank tracks came around the corner and found it. The tank fired its main gun at the loach and missed, but the loach was shot down by small arms fire. The crew was recovered, but the aircraft was lost. In response to the tank sighting, Hawks Claw was launched, but unable to find the now moved and camouflaged tank in the dense jungle. The area was nominated for a B-52 arc light mission that night.

An interesting event took place in the Kontum Pass, south of the city, where ARVN forces had been trying, without success, to open QL 14 between Kontum

and Pleiku. Strong enemy forces occupying well-constructed bunkers and fighting positions bogged down friendly units. Colonel Thuong, II Corps Deputy for Operations, offered one third of his month's pay (about 10,000 piasters) to anyone in the unit he was with who would knock out a 51 cal antiaircraft weapon that had been firing at aircraft that came into the area. His offer was accepted by one of the ARVN soldiers. The soldier got into position, covered by his comrades, and threw a grenade into the cave from which the gun was firing. The soldier observed a 57mm recoilless rifle nearby and knocked this out with a grenade also. Both weapons were brought back to Colonel Thuong, but the gunner of the 51 cal. MG had to be cut loose from the weapon since he was chained to it. This was one more indication that the NVA were decisively engaged and were committed to winning the battle at all costs. The enemy soldier was identified as being from the 40th Artillery Regiment, normally part of the 304th NVA Division, but now, apparently, supporting the 95th B Regiment.



This 51cal machine gun was on display at Lane. This common and deadly anti aircraft weapon was frequently encountered. Its distinctive green tracers looked as big as basketballs.