

1/35th Infantry

13-14 November 1967

I am Dick Arnold of the 35th Infantry. On November 13, 1967 my Company, A, 1/35th, and also B, 1/35th, were picked-up and choppered several miles to secure some downed helicopters. There were four men from B, 1/35th killed in this mission and the next day the 1/35th Battalion CO and his staff was shot down and killed in the same location. The 227th Aviation Battalion moved us on the 13th.

Following are two documents. The first is from the history section of the 227th web site and the second is my recollections. You will note differing statements on how many choppers were actually shot down that day. That is likely due to the 227th only counting their own choppers shot down; and not including those from the Blue Team

From 227th Helicopter Battalion Web Site

Two gunships were on call at LZ Baldy for the 3rd Brigade Ready Reaction Force. The flight leader was on call at Chu Lai. The day seemed to be a slow one for a change. At approximately 1600 hours a call came in that two "B" Troop 1/9 Cav armed helicopters had been shot down about 6 miles Southeast of Que Son, RVN.

Immediately the gun ships were scrambled and the flight leader notified. As soon as the flight leader was airborne, he assembled his flight and gave instructions that they were going to put in a security force around the aircraft and of course, evacuate the crew. Everyone was cautioned that the area was extremely "hot". Enemy troops had been firing on the downed crews from the tree lines surrounding both ships.

The flight leader took his flight of seven slicks to the West of LZ Ross to pick up "A" Company 1/35th, of the 4th Division, which was attached to the 1st CAV. This would be the securing force for both downed aircraft.

As the seven lift helicopters landed with the securing troops near the 1st downed aircraft, the enemy opened up with small arms and automatic weapons fire. The gun ship of "D" Company, 227th immediately placed fires upon the enemy positions. All slicks miraculously got out of the LZ without a hit, due to the excellent gun coverage of Delta Company.

The flight returned and picked up the remaining portion of "A" Company and put them in the same LZ. Again heavy enemy fire was received hitting one of the slicks, rendering it not flyable; as well as putting two rounds in one of the gun ships. The lift was now 6 slicks and the gun ships were both still flyable.

The flight leader took his six ships to pick up "B" Company of the same infantry battalion (1/35th) to secure the 2nd downed aircraft. The second LZ was expected to be much more hot than the first, as there was a village on the west side of the LZ that was known to contain several automatic weapons positions.

As the flight reached about 400 meters from the LZ, the gun ships made their gun run quite successfully and the lift helicopters made it into the LZ without receiving a hit. As the gun ships made a 2nd pass, the enemy opened up with a heavy volume of fire hitting three of the lift choppers.

One slick had to make a forced landing near the LZ. As the gun ship made a pass to protect the slick, the gun ship received several .50 caliber hits forcing him to land. The other gunship continued placing fire on the enemy while two of the empty lift ships came around and picked up the crews of the two new downed aircraft. No one was injured by enemy fire and both emergency landings were completed successfully.

The flight leader then departed to reorganize and refuel. During this time 3 more slicks were sent to the flight leader making a total of eight lift ships. Two additional gun ships were sent up to assist.

The two new (downed) aircraft had to be secured and time was becoming a factor since it was getting dark; the weather was deteriorating rapidly. The flight leader lead his flight of eight to the 1st downed aircraft. A (Slick) was hit cutting the flight down to seven.

The flight returned to make the 2nd pickup and due to excellent coverage of the gun ships, no slicks were hit. It was now very dark and the flight was running in and out of rain showers, but one helicopter still had to be secured. The flight of seven proceeded to pick up the necessary troops for this insertion.

Enroute to the LZ the flight ran into extremely bad weather forcing them to fly low level over areas that they well knew to be hostile. Due to the poor visibility, the flight missed the LZ on the 1st pass. As they were turning around to come in again, one of the lift helicopters received hits and went down. As the guns suppressed for the damaged aircraft, the slick aircraft commander made a call that he had sufficient power to fly the ship back to a secure area (LZ Baldy).

The flight made another 180 degree turn and continued on to their original LZ. The suppressive fires this time had to be closely monitored due to the close proximity of friendly troops. The flight deposited the troops and departed. On departure they encountered fire and the gun ships received numerous hits and a slick was hit but all were still flyable.

The flight was now composed of 6 slicks. All 4 downed aircraft had securing forces around them, but there was still an additional 6 sorties of "B" Company 1/35 to be put into the 2nd LZ where the "B" troop 1/9 gun ship was located. As the flight went into the LZ, the flight leader again briefed the flight to watch the suppressive fires due to the location of friendly troops.

As the flight approached the LZ the lift ships and gun ships were hit with a tremendous volume of automatic weapons fire. The gun ships laced fire on the positions, trying to protect the slicks but three more of the lift ships were hit and one gun ship was hit badly and forced to land. Immediately the flight leader dispatched a slick to pick up the downed crew of the gun ship.

The crew was picked up and all ships departed the area. By this time so many of the helicopters were damaged it was impossible to secure the downed gun ship. It was destroyed during the night by enemy troops using satchel charges.

The results of the nights action were staggering, there were 5 helicopters shot down. There were a total of 13 lift helicopters used, one was shot down and 10 others received a varying number of hits. Several were so badly damaged they could not be flown again until extensive repairs were made. Of the 5 aircraft shot down, all 20 crew members were rescued. The flight leader, LT. James Lawton, was presented the Silver Star for his action by the 1st Cavalry

Division's Commanding General, MG John. J. Tolson. This action was the highlight of the professional attitude the 227th maintained throughout the year...

Dick Arnold's Personal Recollections

Just prior to LTC Kimmell's death, the battalion was attached to the First Brigade of the 101st Airborne during Operation Wheeler in Quang Tin province. On November 4, 1967 the 1/35th became attached to the Third Brigade, First Air Cavalry Division while participating in Operation Wallowa in northern Quang Tin and southern Quang Nam provinces. At this time, the 1/35 was operating in, or slightly outside, the Que Son valley.

That valley is 24 miles long and is nestled on the borders of Quang Tin and Quang Nam provinces. Surrounded on three sides by double-canopy jungled mountains, the valley was home to 60,000 people and very fertile rice paddies. With the twin attractions of a large population to recruit from and an excellent source of foodstuffs, the valley was coveted by the VC/NVA and was hotly contested for the duration of the American involvement.

The four rifle companies of the "Cacti Green", though usually operating in the same general area so as to be somewhat mutually supporting, were usually separated by several kilometers. In addition to distance, the difficult terrain made the helicopter indispensable for the Battalion staff. Using the helicopters as a mobile command post, each company could be visited daily, if required, for consultation with individual commanders. Also, the "big picture" view from above during an actual fight afforded the Battalion staff the advantage of seeing nuances not always as readily noticeable to beleaguered troops on the ground.

The events leading to Colonel Kimmel's death began unfolding on the morning of 13 November 1967. A six-member First Air Cavalry Division Blue team from the 1/9 was operating in western Que Son valley. A Blue team was in essence a self-sustained reconnaissance unit. They would fly around looking for "hot spots", had helicopter gunship support and additional infantry support prioritized to them, and also could call in the regular line companies if the action was too big for them.

On this particular morning, the Blue team spotted an NVA standing in the middle of a rice paddy and making gestures as if he wanted to surrender. Coming closer for a better look, their chopper was shot down by an NVA anti-aircraft battalion dug into a nearby village. The NVA's weapon of choice for such encounters was the 12.7-mm machine gun, their equivalent of our .50 caliber.

The NVA's ultimate goal that morning was not the Blue team but rather the choppers sent to rescue the team and to attack the village. Reliable reports fix the number of helicopters shot down that day at between fifteen and twenty.

As the day wore on the Blue team's position became more and more vulnerable. They were pinned-down with scant cover in a rice paddy outside the village and running very low on ammunition. Their parent unit was spread very thin trying to provide security at every downed chopper.

Being the closest available line company, Company A, 1/35th was ordered to prepare to move by helicopters to their aid. Our sister company, Bravo, was also involved in securing a second downed chopper and crew approximately one kilometer from the Blue team. Bravo Company in fact suffered the loss of one lift ship on the way in, resulting in four deaths.

Company A's pick-up location was several miles to the west, near the site of a major engagement a few days before, on November 9. Then, supported by a squadron of Armored Personnel Carriers (APC's), we had assaulted a suspected NVA hospital complex. The engagement lasted from dawn until dusk with much heroism shown on both sides. The Executive Officer for the APC's, James A. Taylor, was awarded the Medal of Honor that day and the NVA fought to a standstill a total of three American infantry companies supported by armor. Colonel Kimmel had been overhead that day also coordinating air strikes and lifting-in two other companies in an effort to completely cordon-off the complex.

This day the choppers picked us up at about 1730 hours and flew very low on the way in so as not to tip-off the NVA gunners of our approach. Still, we still drew heavy fire as we neared the trapped team, the air being filled with green tracers from the 12.7-mm guns. Several of our lift ships took hits but, miraculously, we landed unscathed and were eventually able to reach the Blue team and spent the night with them in the rice paddy.

During the night the NVA managed to get close enough to hit the Blue team's downed ship with a recoilless rifle. The ship burned all night with ammunition still on board "cooking-off" at frequent intervals. In addition, the trip in had flown us completely off the field map Captain Chaplinski, our commanding officer, had; as a consequence we had no communication with our battalion Net and could not even call in artillery. All in all, it was a very restless night spent in that muddy, damp paddy.

At around 0730 the next morning, Colonel Kimmel's Command and Control chopper (C&C) appeared overhead. Rain had moved in during the night and the morning remained dark and dreary with low-hanging clouds. Aboard with Colonel Kimmel were Major Wynn, the battalion S-3, the artillery liaison, Captain Michael Casp, and 1Lt. Randy Shaffer, plus the two pilots and two door gunners. Their chopper had just left B, 1/35's position.

Colonel Kimmel was talking to our company commander, Captain Charles Chaplinski, by the radio. Apparently a large group of NVA had been spotted to the north and the colonel wanted us to move-out in pursuit of them. Captain Chaplinski replied that we were first waiting for the Blue team to be extracted. The colonel insisted that we move-out immediately but Captain Chaplinski refused, noting that he did not want to leave the Blue team by themselves. The exchange grew very heated and finally the captain agreed to at least start one platoon moving toward the new objective.

All during the radio exchanges we could see green tracers from the southeast rising toward the C&C ship from quite a distance away. Though the NVA had deserted their original position in the village, they still had a presence in the area.

Captain Chaplinski repeatedly warned Colonel Kimmel that they were taking fire, "Sir, you are taking fire, sir please be advised that you are taking fire from the south east."

The colonel finally acknowledged the danger and replied, "We will attempt to rise above it."

Now the 12.7-mm had a range of about one mile, so that was easier said than done.

Shortly after Colonel Kimmel's last transmission, we heard a loud "ping" and looked up to see that the rear rotor had come-off the C&C ship; undoubtedly shot-off. The rear rotor was held on by a large nut, referred to by the helicopter mechanics as the "Jesus Nut," it seems likely that a 12.7 round had hit that nut. Without a rear rotor a helicopter has no lateral stability and

is nearly impossible to control. However, it appeared for a few seconds that the pilot might succeed in landing it.

At this point Major Wynn came on the radio and said, "We are coming in."

Captain Chaplinski replied that they were over our perimeter and they should attempt to come down where we were.

That was the last transmission we heard. Shortly afterwards, the tail of the C&C ship swung completely around, the ship went into a spin, and spiraled, nose-first, straight down.

It hit about 75 yards from our perimeter; there was a brief fire on impact but I seem to recall it being out by the time we reached the helicopter. Lieutenant Shaffer's body was outside and the others were in the wreckage. One of the door gunners had apparently tried to jump clear of the ship, his body was found in a clump of bamboo about 100-150 feet from the crash.

The following men were aboard Colonel Kimmel's C&C ship.



LTC Robert Kimmel

Age 39

Topeka, KS

HHC
1/35th



MAJ Gerald Wynn

Age 34

North Arlington, NJ

HHC
1/35th



CPT Michael Casp*

Age 27

Beaver, PA

CO,
Battery
A, 2/9th
Artillery



2nd LT Randall Shaffer

Age 21

Auora, KS

HHC
1/35th

WO Frank Murrietta

Age 22

Phoenix, Arizona

Pilot

WO Stephen Thornton

Age 20

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Pilot

Pfc Russell McLaughlin

Age 20

Wheeling, West Virginia

Door
Gunner

Sp5 Paul Johnson

Age 24

Lookout, Kentucky

Door
Gunner

Below are the men lost from Bravo Company, 1/35th.



2nd LT. Glenn Eisenhower

Age 21

Belleville, IL

SSG Raymond Garth

Age 23

Tanner, AL



PFC Lawrence Letterman

Age 22

Seattle, WA



PFC Dennis Warne

Age 20

Marion, OH

***Capt Cass was filling in for Capt Pierson who was the Artillery Liaison Officer who would have been on this mission with LTC Kimmel. Pierson was on R&R at the time. (Dennis Dauphin, A Co. 2/35 FO, A/2/9 XO)**