

2Jan72

The flight crew on this mission consisted of the 21st SOS commander, Lt Col. Preston E. Bradley, the pilot. The co-pilot was Robert Lovretich along with two FEs, Bernie "Touch" Touchette was on the left side window and I was on the door. The Heavy Hook commander and their Med Tech were also on board.

When we went in to the LZ it seemed like the world was shooting at us. I was doing well at keeping their heads down. But then my gun quit, I used up all my clips and several rounds from the M-79. If it wasn't for our escorts and some cobras that were nearby we might still be there.

Lt Col Bradley was the only one that was hit and stayed in his seat and told the Med Tech to stop the bleeding. He turned control of the aircraft over to the co-pilot.

The Heavy Hook commander was on the ramp. Before the flight I told him he would need to wear a gunner's belt, which came in handy when the engine blew and the fireball went down the side. He said he was going out, but the gunner's belt pulled him flat on his back. He jumped up, and was going to go again until he looked out at the altitude we had made it up to.

The Med Tech was standing in the FE seat spot and took a round in his ballistic helmet. It took him half way back in the cabin but he wasn't hurt

On the way out of the LZ I pulled the "T" handle on the bad engine. I wanted to punch off the drop tanks, as I knew they had been hit and fuel was running out like a showerhead. Col Bradley said leave them on.

From there we went to Dak To 2 in SVN. We sent the Col on the other bird and they went straight to a medical facility. The Hook Med Tech went with him.

After landing and catching our breath, I noticed that the Hook CO was gone. He had found some Hueys, commandeered them and was on his way back. His results were not that good. I don't have all the info, but they lost 1 bird and I never knew the results of the team. It was just after the little birds left the LZ area that they called in a flight of F-4s with Nape. That had results.

Meanwhile back at the bird, when I got out there was still fuel running out of the right drop. I picked up some twigs and was stuffing them in the holes. Touch said he was going to find somebody someplace and. I started to look the bird over. Some how Touch found some one and a 6 PACK, just the thing.

One of the things that I found out about was why my gun stopped, the two cans had not been linked together.

Touch got a pad and I told him of the damage I had found. When we were done we had a rather detailed list of the damage and the parts needed. When our other bird got back we headed for home.

When we arrived back at NKP it looked like the whole base turned out. This included the Heavy Hook shopping cart!! and it was iced down.

When we hit the deck back at NKP I got out of the bird walked about half way towards the waiting guys and I yelled out " If there's anyone from the arms shop here I'll kill them." I guess I was a little upset about the ammo loading. No one stepped forward or even said anything later on. As all of us that ever were behind a mini gun remember, it does its thing and keeps them down, but when it stops

firing you need to be going very fast, and up.

We had radioed ahead that we had a pretty comprehensive damage assessment. I was asked to go to the Maintenance shack. All of the shop chiefs were there and I debriefed by systems.

The next day (I wanted to help recover my bird). I was told get a beer and go rest. Anyway they loaded all of the parts plus some onto a C-130. This included taking a hoist apart and loading it.

The Army brought in a big team to secure the field. Our guys went to work. Later in the day the C-130 started engines, and someone came to the bird and told the maintenance troops as soon as you finish your work get on the 130. Of course no one had to be told twice.

Then our crew got on the bird and as soon as they could, started the APU. At some point they got engines up and rotors turning and off they went. The Army pulled their troops and the field was overrun a few minutes later.

The bird landed at a base in SVN, so some more permanent repairs could be done. Injury was added to insult, a starch wing taxied to close and ran into the tail rotor. So it would be a few days later before the bird would get home.

Maintenance counted the holes in the bird and told me there was 242 entry holes mostly on the right side. The reason for the engine blowing up was one round went through a gap between the armor plate, and hit a fuel line. We were very lucky that the explosion was contained by the armor and didn't take out some of the rotor system.

I was very lucky as you can see by the picture of my position.

(Harvey Meltzer)

Comments from the co-pilot **Robert Lovretich** added 22 July 2007

Harvey:

I stumbled across an interesting narrative by you on the web regarding our difficulties encountered over 35 years ago.

Thank you for all you and Touch did by your actions to calm down an inexperienced copilot so he could do the things that needed to be done. 242 entry holes on the right side, Gad, I figured we had only 20 or 30.

I did not know you had requested to jettison the aux tanks. Glad Preston said no. We needed whatever fuel we had remaining to get to Dak To 2. When I tested the fuel gages after we were hit, the right side where we were hit tested but the left side would not. I remember seeing the red warning light illuminate on the glare shield when the number two engine caught fire. I called the wrong engine first because the light was on the left of the master caution light on the glare shield and I couldn't see the number two T handle behind the throttle. When I checked the engine instruments I could see the left engine rpm and fuel flow were fluctuating while the right engine gauges were steady. Realizing my error, I remember yelling, "No, no!! Engine fire number two engine. The right engine!! The right engine!!" I was afraid we'd shut down our only good engine, but was relieved you had a better view of the situation than I did. I remember executing the emergency procedures only to realize I was one step behind you. Glad your work with the portable fire extinguisher finally did the trick extinguishing the fire.

Am also glad the transmission held together when I over torqued it trying to get up enough speed and altitude to get out of the LZ. Am also grateful for the navigation assist from the Hobo's and for the low scud parting just as we approached the last ridge before Dak To 2.

We were very lucky, but I'll accept that kind of luck any day. Again thanks for your quick actions. Even your criticism of my landing at Dak To.

Hope all is going well with you and thanks again for saving our skins so long long ago in that galaxy far far away.

Was sorry to hear about Touch. Wrote to Bettye what I could remember about that day at her request. I don't remember flying with you or Touch very much after that.

BOB



 CLICK ON
SMALL BOX TO
PAUSE

CH-53C BATTLE
DAMAGE CABIN DOOR



