1972
(January - May)

UH 34 Flight Time Report, Madriver Project, Contract F04606-71-002:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Month</th>
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January 1, 1972

**Washington Post** story (Jan. 2) described Long Tieng as "a virtual ghost town." Its 30,000 residents have fled, leaving only a badly demoralized army of Meo tribesmen. Air America traffic is constant. US sources confirm that the US has no intention of supporting future attempts by Vang Pao to recapture the PDJ. There are strong indications that the US is prepared to write off Long Tieng if it falls before the beginning of the rainy season in April. According to one US source, "The end to defending Laos is in sight."


January-April 1972

James E. Parker:

January 1971: Positions improved on Skyline. In mid-January, a Volpar photo recon spotted a 130mm field gun with a range of 30 kilometers. The NVA were clearing a road for the gun. If brought into range of Long Tieng, the valley would have to be evacuated. Hmong T-28s, B-52s, and fast movers with laser-guided bombs sought out the guns; but the movement south continued. Hmong families began to move out of the valley.

The 130mm guns opened fire on Skyline/Long Tieng in mid-February. (Actually, the first fire came on December 31.) Air America fixed wing aircraft stopped
landing. The Sky compound was abandoned. HOG, BAMBOO, and BAG moved with Vang Pao to a fortified bunker on the south ridge. LUMBERJACK, HARDNOSE, and ELECTRIC stayed with the Thais in bunkers at the east end of the runway. Other Sky officers worked in the valley during the day, then left on AAM helicopters in the evening for VTE or Udorn. Dick Johnson set up a rear headquarters at LS-272, near the terminus of the road leading north from VTE into the mountains. (VP was not happy with this, as the area was beyond his control.) By the end of February, trucks and AAM transports had built up supplies at 272 for transshipment to the valley and Skyline by helicopter. NVA began ground probes of forward positions of the north slope of Skyline in late February, hoping to capture the ridgeline before the end of the dry season.

In early March, HARDNOSE came to Udorn to talk to Landry. He said that the Thais on Skyline had been under constant attack for the past two weeks. They could not be expected to hold much longer. The Thais knew that they were expendable. Many had friends who had died on the PDJ. Supplies and bunkers were good, as was leadership. But he was fearful that the Thai volunteers might break and run. As Vang Pao was reluctant to commit his Hmong, either fresh Thai volunteers or Lao irregulars from the south had to be brought in.

Vang Pao came up with a plan to move four Hmong GMs out of the valley to positions north and east, putting pressure on the NVA.

In March, tanks joined the attack on Skyline but retreated after two were destroyed on the west end of the ridgeline.

In late March, a number of Sky officers went to VTE to brief Ambassador Godley. Godley expressed his concern about holding Skyline but did not advise on military tactics.

In early April, with the rainy season approaching, the NVA got a toehold on Skyline, capturing a Thai forward position. Two days later, elements of two GMs arriving in the valley, one from MR I and one from MR III. Advisers of the two GMs, TAHN and SWORD, stayed in HOG's bunker and maintained radio contact with the lead elements of the GM during the assault. SWORD briefed Godley in VTE that evening and claimed that his GM would save Skyline. The next day, however, his troops were pinned down. The following day, the two GMs retook the Thai position. Skyline ridge was completely under friendly control by the end of the week. To insure against further attack, two GMs
were brought in from Savannakhet. Founded by USAF, NVA retreated up the river valley to the PDJ.

[Conboy, "Vietnam and Laos": In January, PAVN moved two regiments of 312 Division to positions north of Long Tieng. "Documents found on dead Vietnamese bodies stated that Long Tieng base was to be captured at all costs." Two regiments of 316 Division held high ground between Long Tieng and PDJ, while three independent regiments were in the area north and east of the PDJ. A month of relentless attacks followed. While some patrols were able to penetrate the base at night, Long Tieng refused to fall. By March, after the 312 Division was withdrawn to participate in the Easter offensive in South Vietnam, the siege was lifted. PAVN still had the two regiments between Long Tieng and the PDJ, and the three independent regiments in the vicinity of the PDJ. When the government launched a counterattack in August, PAVN forces were able to defeat them. "This was the first time that PAVN had remained deployed in northeastern Laos and engaged a multi-regimental government force during the height of the rainy season."]

January 1, 1972
Sullivan [now at Ban Xon - 272] to FIC UTH VTE: 20A received heavy shelling in various calibers up to and possibly including 130 mm artillery. Incoming started at 1530L/31 DEC and continued intermittently until 0630L/1. Damage and casualties difficult to assess. Initial reports state the main ramp/parking area contain considerable debris; clearing in progress. Air America buildings and equipment received damage, extent unknown. FIC and Air Ops temporarily located at control tower facility at 272. No Air America casualties. "At 1500L/01 Jan 72 I visited LS-20A for a survey of AAM holdings. FIC/AIROPS building suffered extreme concussion damage with all windows and door missing. Also customer on scene reports lootings of AIROPS bldg. Due to incoming and evacuation I departed LS20A without an inspection of FIC room."

O'Dell, Jan. 5, 1993: "When we began to take 130mm rounds on 31 December, everyone except Hog and Hardnose left the valley. We had an all night twin Otter, flown by CASI, over them. I was one of the first guys up there and remember talking to Hardnose. It was awful: the valley was taking heavy fire (this was about 2200 or so) and fuel and ammo dumps were exploding. It was almost a surreal experience. As far as I know, it was the first use of 130mm guns by the NVA. They also used Talks to try to take Skyline. I have some pictures of a couple of T-34s that were knocked out by mines and they finished off by either arty or air as they tried to come up the road from San Thong."
Ingham, Jan. 7, 1993: "On New Year’s Eve I was in Long Tieng when the NVA began the shelling and spent the night running around the valley trying to dodge the 130mm shells which were being fired into the valley for the first time. The ammo dump also blew up that night so things were in general not good. My link to the outside was Digger who got roused out of a New Year’s Eve party at our favorite steambath parlor in Vientiane so that he could fly above the valley, act as a communications link, and keep me from getting lonely. I remember telling Digger that the shells that were falling were much larger than anything that I had seen before and that I thought that the dreaded 130s had arrived. As I knew no one would believe it without proof, I went out the next morning and gathered up some of the shrapnel and sent it down to Udorn to be analyzed. Sure enough, it was the 130, and the dimensions of the war had changed."

January 5, 1972

News report: US officials say that better than 50-50 chance that Communists will take 20A in next few weeks. Hmong stronghold has been under heavy bombardment since December 31. Surrounded by several NVA regiments (19,000), supported by 130mm guns. Majority of 5,000 Thai in Laos have scattered. 7,000 Hmong/Thai trying to hold base.

NVA capture Skyline ridge. Base subjected to continuous heavy weapons fire. Sappers penetrate as far as VP’s house. Reinforcements from Thailand. Battle up adjacent ridgelines and turn tide. B-52 strikes. "Smart bombs" destroy two 130mm guns. With onset of wet season in April, NVA withdraw.

Castle, citing Logren and Sexton, puts NVA/PL strength at 12,000; VP forces consisting of 19 battalions of irregulars (5,100); 10 battalions of Thai irregulars (3,100); and four battalions of PAR infantry (645). Extensive support from USAF, including use of smart bombs; however, NVA/PL do not withdraw until beginning of monsoon rains in mid-April. Unlike previous years when they withdrew to heavily defended base camps, the enemy remained a day’s march from Long Tieng. As a result, VP’s dry seasons offensive in 1972 made little progress.

January 7, 1972

Sullivan, LS272, to FIC UTH VTE: LS-63 [Moung Nham] lost to enemy at 0300L/7 JAN. FAG SWAMPRAT and friendlies reported moving southwest.

January 8, 1972

[From Brigham]: Message from Customer, passed to Johnson and Brigham by John Ford, who adds his "own appreciation for an outstanding performance."
UNIT WISHES TO COMMEND PFC BRIAN JOHNSON AND CREW ON CHOPPER PHD FOR EXEMPLARY COURAGE AND PROFESSIONALISM DURING MEDIVAC OF LGC WIA ON 8 JAN. COU HAS PERSONALLY EXPRESSED UNIT APPRECIATION FOR PHD EFFORTS ON 8 JAN. REQUEST BASE/STATION PASS TO APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES FINE PERFORMANCE OF THIS CREW UNDER DANGEROUS CONDITIONS.

January 9, 1972

Sullivan, LS272, to FIC UTH VTE: Reports that 20A experienced ground assault this morning, assisted by B-40 rockets. Enemy strength estimated at 30-40 troops. Reported to have gained access to SKY compound and VP's house. No reported customer casualties. 20A air operations resumed at mid-morning today. Caribou, Porter, and R/W landings and takeoffs normal.

January 10, 1972

Sullivan, 272, to FIC UTH VTE: Reports that Sam Thong had enemy in village this morning with air strikes requested and received. Later: KAYAK advised at 1230L that Sam Thong now unfriendly.

January 11, 1972

Sullivan, 272: Action today centered on SKYLINE ridge, with reports of heavy TIC throughout the day. Status of pads unknown FIC at 272 now in tent north of control tower.

January 11, 1972

James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose, staff members of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, arrive Bangkok for a three-week visit. They return and report that the military situation in Laos is "more critical than at any time since 1962." Long Tieng is under siege and its fall is widely predicted. The situation in the south also has deteriorated, with the NVA within ten miles of Pakse. These developments "had plunged Vientiane into a mood of gloom and pessimism." (1)

The staffers were told in Washington and Vientiane that the NVA aims in Laos were to destroy government forces in the north, neutralize Vang Pao, and eliminate Long Tieng as a support base for offensive operations. Long Tieng is important for symbolic reasons; also, its loss would preclude rainy season counteroffensives. The present predicament of Long Tieng is "particularly depressing" to Americans and Lao because the dry season offensive had begun with "an impressive gamble." In May 1971, Vang Pao's forces had driven eastward across the PDJ with U.S. air and logistical support. Defensive positions had been established so that Lao forces would be far to the east when the enemy dry season began. US officials expected the dry season offensive to be the worst since 1962 but they hope
that Vang Pao would hold the PDJ and slow down the NVA advance.

The enemy assault began on December 16, a month earlier than any previous year. Lao T-28s were ineffective due to heavy AAA near NVA ground concentrations. Also, the offensive marked the first use in Laos of Soviet-made 130mm guns with a range of sixteen miles, compared to nine miles for the 155mm guns used by the Thais. The Hmong screening force broke and run, and the NVA regained the PDJ within two days.

There has been almost continuous fighting in Laos since April 1971, unlike previous years, with heavy government losses in the north and south. It is generally agreed that Long Tieng would have fallen without the presence of Thai irregulars.

Udorn is "the most important operational military nerve center in Thailand." (1) Headquarters 7/13 AF; (2) military and USAF intelligence detachments; (3) The CIA installation which is responsible for the irregular program in Laos. It keeps Laos order of battle information, records information on Chinese road building activity in Northern Laos, provides some logistics and operational support to both Lao and Thai irregulars in Laos and performs a liaison function with the [deleted] (333) Headquarters which is the Thai Government unit, also on the Udorn base, that is the liaison office for the Thai irregular forces in Laos; (4) DEPCHIEF, which administers DOD-funded military assistance program in Laos; (5) Det 1, 56th SOW, which trains RLAF pilots, FAGs, and ground support personnel; (6) a helicopter detachment attached to the office of the Army attaché in Laos; (7) Coast Guard group operating Loran navigational system; (8) AAM and CAS - AAM employs 2,000 people at Udorn: 250 U.S., 150 Chinese Nationalist and Filipino, and 1,600 Thai. Also near Udorn is Pepper Grinder, a 379-acre supply depot where DOD military material destined for Laos is stored. (2)

In January 1972, there were 56,800 FAB/FAN forces, and 27,000 Lao irregulars. "The Lao irregular units continue to do most of the fighting." The enemy force is estimated at between 121,000 and 145,000. Using 121,000: 90,000 NVA, 25,000 PL, 5,000 dissident Neutralists, 49,000 enemy in north, and 72,000 in south. Of the 90,000 NVA, 25,500 represent infantry battalions, and the remainder are rear services. When the fighting began in December, the enemy outnumbered the friendly forces 2:1.

The Lao irregular battalions from MRs I and III have been moved temporarily to MR II. The most elite troops are the GMs from Savannakhet. These elite units "were considered to have been the key forces in preventing the enemy from destroying all government forces in the area, although they were badly mauled in the process and suffered a loss of one-third to one-half of their effective forces."
January 13, 1972

Sullivan, 272: From 0100L to 0530L enemy sapper team launched B-40 rocket assault against 272 airstrip complex.

January 15, 1972

R.A. Main (PIC), J. Rhyne (CP) and R. J. Herald, Volpar N9671C, hit by large caliber round while dropping leaflets in effort to find Ritter and crew. Rhyne had right left amputated below knee.

Herald: After Ritter and crew disappeared enroute LS-69 for an arms drop on December 27, leaflets were printed up for drop in the suspected area. Main, Rhyne, and Herald were involved in one of these flights. They were flying a right hand oval pattern, checking their position in order to avoid a road to the north, while they unloaded leaflets through a hole in the door. They were at 14,000 feet. Herald was wearing a flak jacket and parachute. About half the leaflets had been tossed out when Herald heard faint explosions outside the aircraft. This was followed by a deafening roar. Rhyne, who had been on his knees, was blown up in the air and spun around. Herald was blown back against the radio compartment. He checked the pilot, who had not been hit, then looked at the damage to the aircraft. It had been hit by large caliber flak near the wing root. Herald could see the control cables, which were frayed but intact. He told Main to rely on trim tabs for control. Rhyne had lost his foot and was trying to get his belt around his leg to stop the pumping blood. Herald placed his knee in the groin pressure point and stopped the pumping. He stayed in that position all the way back to Udorn. Rhyne remained conscious throughout: "One of the toughest guys I've ever had the pleasure of being around."

Rhyne: They were using a photo bird to drop 3,000 pounds of leaflets. As they approached the area in bad weather, Rhyne went back to help Herald stuff leaflets out of a camera port. They made one circle. On the second loop, at 13,000 feet, the aircraft was hit by a shell from an 85mm radar-controlled gun (they did not know that the enemy had radar guns). The shell penetrated the skin and went off between the skin and the floor. The leaflets acted like sandbags, saving their lives. Rhyne was hit in the arms, leg, and back. His foot was destroyed and his lower leg was held on by only muscle. He had a large piece of flesh torn out of his hip. He tried to get his belt around the pumping leg wound but only had use of one hand. Herald put his knee in Rhyne's groin to stop the pumping blood. Herald's knee hurt more than the wounds. Rhyne stuffed a wad of paper in his mouth against the terrific pain. When they landed at Udorn, customer medic Bob Dingledien jumped on the airplane, took a look, and said "compound fracture."
Rhyne remained conscious until he went into surgery. When he woke up in the ward, it took a few minutes before he realized that he was alive. His first thought was: "So this is what it is like after you die." He remained in the hospital at Udorn for a month, then Godley arranged USAF transfer to Emory Hospital. The gaping wound in his hip continued to cause problems. It had to granulate before a skin graft would be done. On July 15, 1972, he returned to Bangkok on a commercial flight and was picked up by 71C for the flight to Udorn.

January 15, 1972
Washington Post report that Ban Xon, 70 miles north of VTE, began operating as a refugee center and supply depot in March 1970. It has a primitive but clean hospital. Ban Son is now the center of military support for Long Tieng. Soldiers, ammunition, and supplies stream into the valley in everything from C-130s to H-34s. A reporter found a two-year Meo veteran, only 15 years old, wounded in hospital.

January 19, 1972
New York Times reports that NVA are encountering stiffer resistance at Long Tieng. There has been heavy fighting on the long ridge that overlooks the base. The Hmong has retaken nearly 500 feet of the ridge in fierce hand-to-hand fighting.

January 20, 1972
PC-6C N94445, James W. Russell (hired 5/64 - later killed in Mexico) at LS-61 (Ban Tha Si). Aircraft shut down after landing; pilot still in cockpit when mortar barrage hit airfield. Pilot got out of airplane and began running. Mortar blast knocked him to ground. Plane hit. Site overrun. Pilot evaded enemy in jungle until picked up by AAM helicopter.

Washington Post, Jan. 21, published dramatic account of incident. Russell had just landed with five Laotian passengers when the mortars hit [one was Swamp Rat]. They had to run through mortar and rifle to the jungle. They ran through a bamboo jungle for more than an hour, hearing the noises made by their pursuers. Russell activated a pocket emergency radio and contracted a helicopter flown by French Smith and J.J. McCauley. He reached a clearing by a creek. Two Laotians formed a rear guard. He could hear the NVA thrashing through the bamboo. He was hauled up by cable but the cable broke during the pickup of the Laotians. There were brought out by a second helicopter.

January 20, 1972
Washington Post, datelined Long Tieng, Jan. 19: Heavy fighting on Skyline ridge, an escarpment rising sharply 2000
feet out of Long Tieng valley. Most vicious fighting of
entire war took place during past week. NVA seized ridge a
week ago. Waves of bombers called in. An "air of
confidence" in returning to Vang Pao's headquarters with
more than half of the four-mile long ridge recaptured.

*Long Tieng: four miles long, one mile wide.*

*PDJ: 30 square miles.*

*Interview (tape) with Elias P. Chavez, February 2,
1992, Richardson, TX; telephone interview, May 9, 1992*

In December 1971, LS-20A came under attack. Jim Lewis
(SWORD), commander of GM 32 was supposed to go north, but
his GM was understrength with about 700 men. Chavez (SUPER
MEX) was at full strength with 1221 Lao; as a result, GM 30
went to a staging area south of Long Tieng (airlifted by Air
America C-130s) before Christmas.

There was a problem at first about control of the GM.
Vang Pao wanted to control but Chavez refused. He was
backed by Will Green and Gordon Dibble (COB, Savannakhet).
There was a "shouting match" with VP that Chavez won. Bob
Poulton, a former Green Beret, was assigned to assist
Chavez.

After some 10 days in the marshalling area, Chavez was
directed to retake Skyline Ridge, which was held by two NVA
regiments (Chavez was told that the decision had come down
from President Nixon). He developed an attack plan that
Godley approved ("a tough man"), then forwarded to
Washington for final approval.

Chavez, dressed in Mexican hat, Levis, pancho, and
bandoliers, held a "pep rally" before the assault. He wore
a budha, cross, and peace symbol around his neck. On the
first day of the attack [January 1971], he led off with him
best unit, Battalion 301. It suffered 40 KIA in the first
five minutes. The key NVA position was a bunker, fortified
with sand-filled CBU containers, that previously had been
built by the site's defenders. With the attack stalled,
Chavez put his cross in his mouth and charged, firing his
CAR-15 (Poulton provided covering fire). He tossed a
grenade that went into the bunker. He then entered and
killed the occupants. His troops followed him up the hill,
engaging in hand-to-hand fighting, until they reached CW at
the top of the ridge (their objective).

The fighting continued for three weeks. Air America
helicopters "did an outstanding job" with resupply efforts.
Chavez remembers Brian Johnson.

Enemy 130mm artillery fire took a heavy toll of the Lao
troops during this period. Jim Lewis, who arrived with GM
32, took back CA. The NVA counterattacked, pushing the Lao
troops back to CW. Chavez then led a night counterattack
that threw the NVA beyond CA. Hugh Murray, commanding a GM
from Luang Prabang, attacked and took CT. At the end of three weeks, Chavez's GM 30 went back to Savannakhet with only 300 effective men.

On February 8, 1974, Chavez was awarded the CIA Intelligence Star for his conduct during this period. Colby, in making the presentation, said: "But I think the medal that we give you today shows that we gave it not just for the valor but also for the skill, because it's quite clear that in the attack on Long Tieng and the way your regiment performed there in regaining the top of the hill under fire and with a lot of trouble, that you made a major contribution. I think you made a major contribution not only to that battle, but also to a successful outcome in Laos. That was a very sticky period. And the situation in Long Tieng was considered a critical one. That's why we brought your regiment up from Savannakhet to help meet what was obviously critical test of whether the free side of Laos would last or not. And your regiment played a major role in seeing that Long Tieng didn't fall. So the fact that we have reached a cease-fire there, that just this week they have made several steps toward achieving some kind of a coalition government . . . is a good part a credit to your work."

Mike Ingham to WML, Jan. 7, 1993:
"I find Chavez’ account to be, at best, fanciful. I do not doubt that his units were involved with the recovery of some of the pad on Skyline but I do not believe his account of his personal involvement. I also do not believe any of that stuff about approvals from Godley and Nixon. A number of us got the Intelligence Star but it was for a lengthy period of duty, not any particular action."

Jim Glerum to WML, January 4, 1993:
"It is true that the Savannakhet GM’s had become the project’s fire brigade and, in particular, performed magnificently in the battle for Skyline Ridge. However, I would give top honors during that period to Jim Barber (one of two native Americans) and his GM (I forget the number). Although I cannot categorically state that Eli did not lead the GM 30 charge, I consider it highly unlikely. If he had done so, it is virtually inconceivable that we would not have heard about it - and taken action to rein him in (as we had to do periodically with some of the younger officers). That notwithstanding, there is no question that Eli and a goodly number of other were legitimately heroic and earned their Intelligence Stars. To properly support their units, the case officers had to get extremely close to the action and there were NVA all over the place. In fact, it was a miracle that we lost no case officers during the Skyline Ridge affair."
James A. Barber to WML, February 8, 1993:

"My G.M., G.M. 31, was in Long Tieng during the latter part of 1971 and early 1972 and first deployed between Sam Thong, and the ridges in between, to Long Tieng. Originally, Vang Pao ordered the G.M. to move to the south end of the PDJ but heavy enemy resistance prohibited this. We then fell back, and secured the ridge line between Sam Thong and 20A. We later replaced either G.M. 30 or 32 on Skyline Ridge and remained in the Long Tieng area for approximately two months.

In regard to Eli Chavez's version of the re-taking of Skyline Ridge, I can only say that I was in the staging area with Eli and during the attack by G.M. 30. At no time during or after his stay in the 20A area were his feats mentioned. Knowing his personality, you can bet that had he done what he said he did we all would have heard about it. In addition, Eli stated "that he led a night counterattack that threw the NVA beyond CA." We (the customers) were ordered that under no circumstances were we to remain overnight with the troops. Each case officer was accounted for at the end of the day by the station chief. I sincerely doubt the story as told by Eli."

[Telephone interview with Barber, April 8, 1993: He recalls daily morning staff meetings at Long Tieng with Vang Pao, Jerry Daniels, case officers, etc. They would be briefed on the previous night's activities and plan operations for the day. Vang Pao was in command but decisions were reached through discussion. Barber recalls that the senior commander of his GM did not wish to pay the troops in the field on payday, as was customary, as he feared that they might vanish. Junior commanders complained to Vang Pao, and he ordered the men paid. Barber was able to persuade Vang Pao to rescind the order. (Barber received the intelligence star for actions in the Savannakhet area.)]

O’Dell to WML, Jan. 5, 1993:

After everyone but Hog and Hardnose left on January 1: "Most of the people had gone to the south and the NVA were on Skyline ridge. We were spending the nights in Vienvane and working out of LS 272. I remember we killed some NVA down in the valley. I don’t remember them getting as far as VP’s house, which was well up on the southern end and side of the runways, but we killed some down by the Pagoda. We were constantly taking arty fire in the valley. Greek was working airops out of a small bunker-like building under a karst where he was sheltered from most of the incoming. The air force kept telling us they’d knocked out the 130s but they sure kept on shooting. I don’t remember the assault on the compound but the entire period was very tough."
fumes left in the tank.
While we were refueling, we were all feeling
pretty good about saving the downed pilot, but
mainly we were glad to still be alive. Being the
nice guy I am, I decided to have a little fun
with the pilot. There was a rumor going around
(with the Air Force) that Air America crews
received a $10,000 bonus when we recovered a
downed airman. Not true.

I got with the pilot and told him that we
wouldn't be taking him directly back to his base
(NKP, Thailand) and would be going on to Pakse.
Of course at that point anything I said would
have been fine with him. I further explained
that he was worth ten grand to me and my crew
and we hadn't been paid for our last rescue. So
we wanted to make sure we turned him over to the
right person to get credit for the bonus. He
bought it all, hook, line and sinker.

With in an hour we landed at the Pakse Airport,
turned the happy pilot over to his Air Force
representative, and reported in to our
"customer," Jim Butler. Jim (call sign "Grey
Fox") told us to assemble in the briefing room.
We had a mission (exfill) in the Bolivian
plateau. Another hot one to finish out the day,
18 March 1972.

Three helicopter crews were assembled in Jim
Butler's briefing room. A battalion of Lao
soldiers have been under daily attack by NVA
artillery and have about thirty wounded soldiers
to be picked up. They were located on the
Bolivian plateau and were on the move to an area
that would be safe enough for a helicopter
pick-up. The LZ would be on a high open area
about thirty miles east of Pakse.

I was going to be the flight leader in "Hotel
70", with the other two H-34's to follow close
behind. The third aircraft would remain high and
become the SAR aircraft in case one of us was
shot down. Piece of cake!

Then into the room came the "customer", a CIA
case officer named Jim Lewis (call sign
"Sword").

The plan was Jim would ride in my bird, be
dropped off at the pick-up zone, sort out the
wounded while we orbited over head, and call me in when they were ready. We'd land one at a time. If the first aircraft didn't receive any fire the second would land and pick-up more wounded. We'd continue making trips until all of the wounded were picked up, or we started to receive fire.

On the Bolivans the enemy (NVA) had artillery and some light armor. The Lao and Thai soldier's were not as heavily armed. All they had was limited air support when the weather permitted and, of course, Air America.

The Pakse airport is located on the Mekong River and during that period was a relatively safe area. About fifteen miles east, where the high plateau of the Bolivans begin, was pretty much controlled by the enemy. The Royalists (Lao Army) had occupied most of the plateau (at least the populated areas) until late 1971. Gradually, the NVA had pushed the Royalists out and by March of 1972 controlled most of the Bolivans.

After about fifteen minutes of flight time we were nearing the landing zone. We remained high and looked for the proper signal panel to appear on the pad. A white "O" was put out and I could see about thirty soldiers standing around the LZ. The fact that they were not hidden from view meant that there probably hadn't been any recent enemy contact.

I dropped off "Sword" while the other two H-34's remained high over-head. The landing caused a great deal of brown dust which would definitely alert any enemy in the area that a chopper had landed.

In about five minutes "Sword" called that they were ready for the first aircraft- me. The litters with the wounded were lined up next to the pad where I landed; again, creating a large cloud of dust.

I kept the RPM up and the aircraft light on the struts, expecting incoming fire at any time. The wounded were being loaded when I heard the first explosion about three hundred meters behind us!

I would wait about ten seconds before taking off, giving "Sword" a chance to get in the
aircraft. I figured that if a second round was fired, it still wouldn't hit us (hopefully).

There were several litters and walking wounded at the doorway when the second round hit. Right in the middle of the troops next to the aircraft! Five feet left and we would have been history.

I was looking down from the right seat at the loading procedures when the round exploded. The concussion and noise from the impact were instantaneous, but the resulting mass of bodies being thrown in all directions seemed to happen in slow motion. Just like a "Spaghetti Western". I hoped that "Sword" had jumped aboard because we were out of there. We had a heavy load, and because of the high elevation, it seemed to take forever for the H-34 to gain airspeed. As we were climbing out, another round went off under us. They were trying to shoot us out of the air!

Jim was with us in the aircraft, but he'd received a shrapnel wound. There was also a wounded soldier hanging on to the wheel strut! The back of his shirt was covered with blood and as we gained airspeed and altitude, I expected to watch his body drop hundreds of feet into the jungle. Too bad.

Suddenly, the muscular arm of my flight mechanic, Jim Nakamoto, reached out the aircraft cargo door, grabbed the soldier's shirt, and yanked him inside! Another life saved, as we heard later, because the soldier survived from his wounds.

By the time we arrived back at Pakse the sun was setting. We inspected the aircraft for damage, but there were only a couple of small holes. No problem.

The mission would be continued in the morning. This would give the Lao army time to move to another location. Meanwhile, after a very eventful day to say the least, we were ready to suck down a few cool ones. As I had mentioned before, 18 March 1972 is a day I'll always remember.
The toughest fighting of the war took place on Skyline ridge. My GM was not involved in it. The Thai's did most of the fighting and we had lots of B-52 strikes on the ridgeline.

I remember Supermex and Sword coming to 20A. I don't remember, and would not have been part of the discussion, anything about control of the GM. While the way Eli says he was dressed sounds bizarre, it may have been just like that. Most of the 20A case officers wore camo utilities or parts of them. I have a real problem with his description of the assault that he led. All the case officers were prohibited from engaging in actual combat like this. In fact, as I remember it, if you were doing it and it became known, you were fired and sent home. So I have a hard time accepting his account of the battle.

The Savannakhet GMs were very good. But, and it's a big but, there was a reason or two for that. First, they were hired and fired by their case officers. They were also paid and trained by their case officers. You could promote and demote as you felt necessary. Last, there wasn't the degree of fighting around MR III that we had so they were fresh troops. Nobody had the month in month out pace of combat that the Hmong had; they were being ground down by it.

G. McMurtrie Godley to WML, July 28, 1992:
"An operation such as retaking the Skyline would be based on decisions taken in Vientiane and Long Thien. Washington would not have been consulted. The more we made the decisions in Laos and the less we bothered Washington was to everyone's interest, both Washington's and Vientiane's.

Operations in Northern Laos would usually be initiated in Long Thien with Vang Pao. Nearly simultaneously CIA personnel in Udorn and Vientiane would staff them out, and I would be consulted. Air America was considered an integral part of the CIA operations and its support of the ground operation, i.e., troop movement, re-supply, etc., would be part of the staffing process."

**January 21, 1972**

New York Times publishes major story about war in Laos. Concerned about early NVA offensive, US government has lifted much of secrecy about war. Reporters allowed into Long Tieng on January 19. Embassy says that they will run out of money for economic and military aid for Laos well before the end of the fiscal year in June unless Congress raises the $350 million ceiling that it imposed last fall.

**January 28, 1972**

Sullivan, Daily Sitrep, Gold Zone (north of Route 7):
"At 27/1200 hours journalist Robert Rogers and three film and sound crewmen of NBC arrived at LS-32... The LS-32 Customer questions the rationale which permits an area such as Bouam Long to be made into an international news story. Although there is little doubt that the NVA already realize that Bouam Long is a psychological symbol for the Meo, Leo Theun and Lao, they probably would take even greater interest in blotting out Bouam Long once it becomes an area known to the American public as a symbol of resistance to the NVA."

January 30, 1972

UH-34 H77, PIC T. Woosley, E.R. Sullivan, R.C. Ajero, near LS-69 (Ban Xien Lom). Departing LS with three wounded Thai soldiers when aircraft hit by heavy small arms fire. Loss of engine oil pressure but able to make it to Ban Xien Lom.

Sullivan to Galt, 19 May 92: We were on a medevac mission with two RLAf T-28s for cover. "We get in OK, but only way out is to west over valley. Both T-28s shot down over valley. We get hit bad, fly five minutes, and touch down just as both engine and transmission seize! Rotor is down to about 85 percent when we hit, and stops instantly! I had 12.7 hit middle of seat back and penetrate all but .0001 of armor plate. Bruise on back for months."

February 1, 1972

Ex-PACAF staff officer and former commander of fighter squadron had retired and was flying for Air America. Recently furloughed, he was passing through Honolulu when former PACAF associates questioned him about effectiveness of Air America. "Most of the pilots have been with the company for many years and have an intimate knowledge of all the terrain feature and operational peculiarities of the area. They are honed to a keen edge of perfection."

Average captain flies 100 hours a month and makes $35,000 a year.

February 4, 1972

C-7A 61-2393 crashed while attempting to go around at Pha Khoa (LS14). Pilot Gordon V. Smith suffered spine injuries; copilot D.M. Houston fractured skull; AFS M.S. Bailey minor injuries; AFD Khanouth Sousadalay killed.

Bailey: This was a typical resupply mission, carrying troops from LS-272 to LS-14. From Pha Khoa, helicopters would pickup the troops and take them to mountaintops. They had made several shuttles, shoving people into the airplane until it was full. This was against regulations (30 seats on Caribou) but the Customers had authority to waive the requirement; he just signed the log book. On the third
shuttle of the day, Bailey was sitting on a ledge near the
door, reading a book, when he heard the copilot call out "40
knots." The pilot elected to go around but he pulled up the
flaps with the gear and the aircraft pancaked into the
ground. Bailey and the troops got out the back of the
airplane. [Gamelin: He refused to fly with Smith, who was
known as a lousy pilot.]

February 18, 1972

Washington Post reports counterattack on PDJ to relieve
pressure on Long Tieng. Several thousand guerrillas are
attacking enemy supply routes.

Tovar, March 13, 1972: 22 NVA battalions had
surrounded Long Tieng. Vang Pao wanted to use 5,000 men to
attack the enemy in the rear. Godley gave his approval, and
the troops were taken to Pha Kha and Padong. They marched
out for over a week, maintaining radio silence, then
attacked in the southern end of the PDJ. The NVA had to
pull out 11 battalions to meet the threat. Shortly after
this, there was a conference in Saigon. General Abrams was
so impressed with Vang Pao's bold strategy that the attitude
at MACV became much more supportive of operations in Laos.

February 19, 1972

Sullivan, 272: Efforts to move into position on PDJ
realized with units reaching Route 13 in the vicinity of
UG200418 and UG090390. Enemy resistance is increasing as
the friendly units secure more ground.

February 22, 1972

Sullivan: Heavy incoming in PDJ sector has produced
many friendly casualties in the late PM of 21 FEB. F4s
Showboat and Yukon were both wounded and medevaced this
morning.

February 28-29, 1972

Sullivan reports that unusually inclement weather has
precluded major air strikes in MR II.

March 1, 1972

Washington Post story by Laurence Stern, datelined Long
Cheng: Quoting Vang Pao: "The North Vietnamese have
artillery and they have tanks. Their artillery is bigger
than what we have here - they have a 27 kilometer range and
ours is 15 kilometers. Out there on the Plain of Jars we
have no artillery at all. We have very few people and not
enough materiel. It is getting very difficult to hold the
situation." - U.S. airstrikes have been hampered by haze -
Ambassador Godley has monitored the military situation with
a fervor that has earned him the nickname "Field Marshal
Godley." Vang Pao bracing for new assault by eight NVA
RESCUER – By Ben A. Van Etten
4/15/2000 1:00 PM

RESCUER
By Ben A. Van Etten

There are certain dates in a lifetime of events that stay etched in your memory. I can vividly remember, for example, my wedding day, where I was the day that JFK was assassinated, and other events important to my family. Another time was the 18th of March 1972.

I was the pilot on an H-34D helicopter for Air America. It started as a routine flight from Udorn, Thailand to Pakse, Laos. My passengers were mainly flight crews “dead heading” up country for a crew rotation. I was scheduled to remain six days in Pakse.

“King” was the call sign of the Air Force airborne controller for search and rescue (SAR) missions in Laos. I was about ten minutes from landing for refueling in Savanakhet, Laos when “King” was broadcasting a message for “any Air America helicopter in the Savanakhet area that might be available to help rescue a downed pilot.”

Normally the military took care of their own SAR’s, but Air America made many rescues simply because we were in the area. Some times the Air Force was its own worst enemy because by the time birds were scrambled, briefed, cover provided, MIG cap provided, and authentication of the downed pilot (as if the enemy would stage
a fake crash) were made, he'd probably be captured. On two other occasions I'd picked up a downed crew, moved them to a safe area, and finally the military would make their pick up.

I responded that I could be available, after refueling.

I was given a radio frequency to contact "Sandy one" once I was back in the air. He would be the on scene commander directing the rescue operation.

The downed aircraft was an OV-10 forward air controller (FAC) out of Vietnam. It had been shot down by anti-aircraft over route twenty three (part of the Ho Chi Min Trail) about 40 miles east of Savanaket. The crew was hiding on the east side of the "road," which was alive with massive anti-aircraft activity, and a quick pickup could avert certain capture by the NVA.

I contacted "Sandy one" shortly after takeoff and was advised to head east to route twenty three and take up an orbit, but don't cross the road.

"Hotel 70", my call sign, "Rogers." Sandy one and Sandy two were a flight of A1E Sky Raiders and normally escort the CH53 (Jolly Green Giant) rescue helicopters.

As I flew closer to the area I could hear Sandy one talking to the downed pilot over the UHF guard frequency. He was OK, but the NVA soldiers were starting to look for him.

I might add at this point that March is the height of the"smoky" season when the farmers in that part of the world slash and burn, clearing areas of the jungle for planting the next season's crops. Visibility on that day, because of the smoke, was down to about one mile with no ceiling.

I flew up to route twenty-three and began an orbit when I called Sandy with my position. I also requested the coordinates of the downed airman, which he refused to pass. "Besides," he said, "the Jollies were on the way and would be making the pickup."
That was just fine with me and my crew. We didn't relish the idea of flying through 37mm AA, not to mention the 23mm and 12.7's that were reported in the area.

Finally, I heard the Jollies call Sandy with an ETA of fifteen minutes. Sandy replied with "continue inbound while I descend toward the target to get a visual on the downed pilot." A few seconds later Sandy's wing man reported ground fire directed toward Sandy one. Sandy replied with "Roger, I heard the shots, but didn't take any hits."

Even though I was only a mile or so away from the pickup point, I had yet to see the Sandies because of the smoke.

The next radio transmission was from one of the Jollies saying with a nervous sounding voice that he needed to RTB (return to base) because of a fluctuating gauge (probably his blood pressure). Number two came back with "I'm right behind you." He sounded relieved.

I called Sandy again and requested the coordinates.

He was going to make another pass over the area and would get back to me.

Again Sandy two broadcasting "You're receiving fire."

Sandy one answered, "I've been hit and I'm on fire!"

I interjected at that point to turn to 270 before bailing out.

"Negative, I'm heading south and ejecting right now!"

Obviously, I wanted him to head west toward us and bail out on the west side of route twenty three. We hadn't had a visual on him yet. As he was making his last transmission I turned the UHF homing switch that showed his position from us as 080.

I was orbiting at 3000 feet and nosed over to descend to tree top level, before crossing the road.
The other two crew members (Captain B.J. Ruck, my co-pilot, and Flight Mechanic Jim Nakamoto) both agreed to go on with the rescue. There was no doubt that this one could definitely turn into a "rotten sandwich." We all needed to be on the same sheet of music.

Another Air America H34 crewed by Bill Johnson and Dave Ankerberg arrived as my backup and would remain in orbit west of the "trail" while I went in for the pickup.

We were low level with the wheels inches from the tree tops, heading 080, pulling lots of power, maintaining max air speed (above VNE, no doubt). When we crossed route nine, which seemed like a four-lane highway, we were exposed much longer than we'd anticipated. It took about ten to fifteen seconds to cross! The "pucker factor" was also "red lined," but we never heard a shot! Back over the trees we breathed a bit easier.

Looking ahead through the smoke and haze we could see the fire and black smoke bellowing from Sandy's wreckage. I turned a few degrees left figuring that the plane probably flew on for a few seconds after the pilot ejected.

About that time Sandy one called on his survival radio that he could hear us and that we were headed straight for him. I spotted his orange parachute and noted with some dismay that he was hanging about fifty feet up in a tree!

I settled to a low hover over him for a hoist pickup with the jungle penetrater. Jim operated the hoist as I hovered the aircraft. B.J. had his Uzzi, loaded, on his lap, watching out the left side. (As if the Uzzi would do us much good against a squad of pissed off NVA soldiers with AK47's!)

Sandy two was in a tight orbit over us. We felt good about that, those AIE's packed a lot of fire power!

The pilot was looking up at us with a big grin as Jim worked the hoist to lower the penetrater. I was thinking it was a bit early for celebration, we had a long ways to go.
This particular hoist only had one speed, slow. It seemed to take forever for it to get to him.

Meanwhile, we were expecting the bad guys to come running out of the jungle with guns blazing. Under the triple canopy the ground appeared open.

Jim came over the intercom and advised us that our grinning pilot couldn't reach the penetrator! Jim was trying to swing it to him, but because of the dense tree foliage, it wasn't happening.

About that time we heard the first round explode above us! I'm not sure if "Charley" was shooting at our cover AIE or was trying to lob an air burst at us. Anyway, times were a bit tense.

We retrieved the hoist while the pilot was able to rappel to the ground, unhook from his survival pack, and move to a more open area.

We moved over him again, lowered the penetrator, he hooked up and we began the extraction. A second explosion was heard overhead. It sounded close!

To add to our concerns, the 30 minute low fuel light had been illuminated for approximately 20 minutes. We finally got him into the aircraft and figured that we'd been hovering there for 34 minutes! Luck was with us, the bad guys were still a no show.

I gave "King" a call to let him know we had "Sandy one" on board and were heading out.

King advised us not to re-cross in that area, but to head south and cross the road near the town of Saravan where it was safer. Unfortunately we were too low on fuel to go far. If we were going to run out of gas, the west side of the road was our best option. I advised "King" that we'd have to cross at the same area where we came in.

I'd radioed to have a drum of fuel brought out. After crossing route twenty three (again without incident) we rendezvoused with the other chopper, landed in a field, and hand pumped 55 gallons of gas into what must have been only
regiments. A two-week old spoiling operation directed against NVA supply routes show no sign of having slowed down NVA columns.

March 5, 1972
Connor, 272, reports that the last three days have been very quiet.

March 9-10, 1972
North Vietnam attacks across DMZ.

March 16, 1972
Washington Post story datelined Vientiane: "Thai air force helicopters, some of them armed, are being used in combat here in apparent violation of the congressional prohibition against U.S. financing of their country forces here. Thai pilots are flying both medical evacuation and combat support missions in the area of the Long Cheng military complex 80 miles north of here, according to knowledgeable U.S. sources. The Thais are using UH1-E (Huey) helicopters on loan from the United States, the sources said, and fly from Udorn airbase in northern Thailand. Command of the helicopters is said to lie with CIA advisors to Gen. Vang Pao." A State Department sources denied that the Thai pilots were under U.S. command. Pilots were involved in the same program under which other Thai volunteers were fighting in Laos under the command of Vang Pao. Information on the helicopters came to light last weekend when one of the Hueys crashed just north of Vientiane in a violent thunderstorm, killing at least four crew members. The helicopters are being serviced by Air America at Udorn.

Early March 1972
Jim Parker leaves his desk job in Udorn and is assigned to Long Tieng. He is to make contact with scattered Hmong groups in the mountains. He is given Va Xiong as his ops assistant. Each Sky officer had an ops assistant, who were the brightest of the Hmong nation. They translated, liaised, etc. They also kept Sky officers away from opium. Headquarters wanted no complicity in the drug business, or even the appearance of impropriety. "The ops assistants were the first and last lines of defense." Va Xiong was wounded in April when Daddio hit a mine on landing.

March 18, 1972
Bell 204B N8535F on resupply mission from 20A to TG93778. Just as load touched the ground, aircraft came under heavy automatic weapons fire. Released load. Pilot Wayne Knight wounded in left leg. F/O M. R. Braithwaite multiple minor injuries; F/H Robert B. Noble, abrasions right cheek.
Knight, "Statement," March 20, 1972

Knight arrived at the airfield at Vientiane at 0630. He had breakfast and was briefed by FIC. FIC reported TIC at CC and CG on Skyline; otherwise, no changes from Knight's last trip into the area on March 16. Braithwaite arrived on A DH-4 from Udorn; he reported that FIC Udorn had reported incoming artillery fire at CC and CG but had not reported any TIC.

Knight departed VTE at 0725 and arrived overhead 20A at 0820. He contacted H-62 (Henthorn), who had been working the area for an hour. Henthorn reported TIC and CC and CG, and early morning artillery fire at CE and CB. Knight then contacted HOG on 118.3 and asked for tactical situation and work assignment. Bounder assigned Knight to work as directed by personnel on the ground at CN.

Landing at CN, Knight was advised by flash card that his first trip would be to DE in the LS20 area. "I advised the dispatcher that "DE" was unacceptable due to the tactical situation at LS20." He responded by flashing, CC, CG, CB, and DL in rapid succession as Knight refused each in turn. He accepted an assignment to CI, carrying an external load. Returning to CN, the dispatcher again flashed CC and CG cards. Knight called him over to the aircraft and told him the CC and CG had TIC, and CB and CE had been receiving incoming. Knight took a trip to CR (whose designation had been changed from TC that morning). Departing CR, BAMBOO asked him to pick up the commander and one other man at CT. Knight contacted H-77 (Charles R. Frady) on UHF for information on CT and was told that everything was quiet. However, on landing at CT, a group of some eight soldiers tried to force their way onto the aircraft. Upon FM Noble's advice, he took off after loading two men.

At 0925, CN flashed the card for CE. As Knight earlier had heard H-77 reported trips to CE, he did not inquire about security. About one minute from landing at CE with and external load of 750 pounds of fresh food, Knight observed H-77 departing after dropping its external load. "After commencing approach and while on very short final, I commented to FO Braithwaite that I didn't see any personnel on the landing zone; he replied that might could he but he the 3 loads previously deposited by H-77 in sight. The signal "CE" was clearly visible but it held no particular significance other than that of zone identification since all of the Skyline ridge signals were of the "permanent" variety. I continued my approach to external load touchdown and upon depressing the external load release I heard very loud automatic weapons fire from what I judged to be the right rear of the aircraft. Simultaneous to the fire there was smoke and debris throughout the cockpit, and I immediately pushed the cyclic control forward, initiating a "dive" off the ridgeline to the west. Throughout the
maneuver I could hear FM Noble yelling "get out of here." and FO Braithwaite advising other aircraft of our plight." Knight voiced "Mayday" but could hear himself speak. Three other aircraft were in the vicinity, and he heard them advising him to land. "I was occupied in monitoring engine instruments and deterning the extent of my injuries while FO Braithwaite conversed with the other aircraft, hence there was some momentary confusion as to just where we were going to land. I saw that my left leg was bleeding, but I felt no particular pain and I felt that I was otherwise uninjured. In the process of looking at my leg, I noted a hole through the pilot's cyclic stick and realized why my radio transmissions were unheard. I noticed that FO Braithwaite was bleeding extensively from the facial area, but both he and FM Noble stated that they felt OK." Knight landed at CN, where a customer applied a compress to his leg. He and Braithwaite were evacuated to LS272 on H-77.

Mike Ingham to WKL, Jan. 7, 1993:

"Knight landed on the wrong pad on Skyline. The one he tried to drop his load on was an abandoned pad that was located at the point where the road from Sam Thong to Long Tieng crossed Skyline ridge. He was actually supposed to be dropping it at a pad a couple of hundred yards further east on the ridge. As he described it, an NVA jumped out of a hole and let go a whole AK 47 magazine. As soon as I heard it, I went up to the position and we sent a patrol of Thais down to the pad where the incident occurred. They immediately got into a firefight and we sent more troops to back them up. The fight went on all afternoon against a company of NVA. We killed 19 and captured one. There were several Thais lightly wounded and one seriously. The prisoner told us that the NVA were sent to occupy the abandoned position as preparation for the NVA attacking 20A by sending tanks up the road from Sam Thong. The tanks came anyway (I think that it was that night) and I spent a long evening trying to get an Air Force Spectre gunship to shoot at the tanks (they never fired a shot - rules of engagement). As it turned out, the first two tanks hit mines that I had had the Thais put down, and the hulks blocked the road preventing the rest of the tanks from getting into the valley. I went up the next morning and took pictures of the tank carcasses, and it turned out that they were T-34s - the first time we had seen anything other than the PT76 light tank. My guess is that the NVA in those holes had strict orders to remain there undetected, and the guy who got up to blow a magazine at 35F simply could not resist the temptation of a chopper that close."

[Ingham, Jan. 17, 1993: The sequence of events in the above is a little mixed up. The day after the Knight]
incident, on March 19, the NVA attacked and captured Sam Thong, losing three PT-76 tanks during the attack. Ingham had learned from the prisoner that the NVA were planning to send heavy T-34 tanks along the road from Sam Thong to Long Tieng, which would have been a disaster for the defenders. He had the Thais manning the position between Sam Thong and Long Tieng put out some mines. As it turned out, NVA sappers removed all the mines except for the two that were close to the Thai position. On March 30, two T-34s were destroyed by these mines. Ingham had tried to get a circling AC-130 to use its 105mm howitzer on the tanks. The pilot said that he had acquired the signature of the tank engines on his infra-red equipment but could only fire visually due rules-of-engagement (fear of hitting friendlies). Although Ingham tried to convince him that there were no friendlies anywhere near the tanks, the pilot still refused to fire. - (Later): "Although we were never entirely sure, best guess is that there were 4 tanks. The first hit a mine. The second tried to go around it and hit a mine and the rest called it a night. As you can see from the brass lying on the ground [in the photo], they fired off their ammo before the crews abandoned the tanks. For some reason the NVA sent up sappers one night and blew the wrecks of the tanks all to hell. I always wondered why? Where they afraid that we were going to use them militarily? For political purposes? The first Thai position was only a 1000 or so yards up the ridge to the East. One of the Thai sergeants fired at the tank with a 75mm recoilless rifle that was in the position and the tank fired back killing the sergeant. At that point the Thais started to abandon the position. After awhile they realized that the tanks were immobilized and they reoccupied the position before daylight. They chewed up ground that you see around the tanks came from artillery that we put in all night long. It was fired from the Thai battery I mentioned that was Southeast of Long Tieng 5-6 kms."

Interview with Wayne Knight (tape), August 9, 1992, Phoenix, AZ:

Knight was on leave from late 1970 to January 1972. During this time, he corresponded with John Ford. When he returned, VP Richmond told him that he would take over as chief pilot but wanted him to fly the line for a time and get information on FEPA; Richmond was determined to break the union. Knight went into Bells (he had been on UH-34s previously). FEPA filed a grievance but management stalled while Knight remained on the Bells. By the time the union prevailed, Knight had moved up to chief pilot.
Gary Connolly and I were in H-53, Suponchai and another Thai pilot were in H-54, and Emmet Sullivan was single piloting H-73. I was the senior pilot present, and as such, decided that because the bad guys were in close proximity to the pad, and because I often had great difficulty understanding the Lao [T-28] pilots, thought it prudent to split the crews so that we'd have a Thai pilot in each aircraft who (besides Thai) was also fairly fluent in Lao and English as well. I thought that in the event the shit hit the fan, at least we'd be able to communicate with all the participants involved.

When he knew the Tangos were on the way, we fired up, met them over the pad, and then made two, three, maybe four trips over the short distance from there to [Xieng Lom]. We thought that if we were going to get a blast from the PL, it would probably come on the last lift, when the number of men on the pad was too low from them to be able to adequately defend themselves. They were scared shitless as they cowered in their trenches, awaiting our arrival - and after we landed they slithered along the ground, trying not to expose themselves until the unavoidable moment when the poor bastards had to stand erect to board the helicopter. Of course I could empathize with them, I felt pretty vulnerable myself, as I sat in the cockpit, ten feet above the ground, in full view of anyone who wanted a little target practice.

It was early afternoon, of what had been a somber day, and the sky was still gloomy and overcast when we completed the evacuation. Clean now approached me about going to the other pad to collect the men who'd been wounded during the previous night's attack, and I asked, "What's changed over there since this morning?"

"Well, nothing," he replied, "but their commander is putting pressure on me to do something about the wounded, and I'd like to show him I'm doing all I can."

"What about cover? The Tangos have already gone back to Houi Sai."

"Well, I've already sent a request for them to return after they're refueled. They could be back about 3 o'clock."

Gary and I exchanged glances that implied, "I don't like the sound of this," and we backed off to have a private chat about it.
Shit tends to roll down hill, and it was clear that Clean was trying to appease the Lao commander to maintain his working relationship with him, and was dumping the load on us in the process. At time it would be forgotten that we were unarmed civilians (that is, our helicopters were unarmed, and we were not providing our own cover), flying very vulnerable aircraft, in what was supposed to be a support role. We were not a combat assault force. But Gary and I decided we'd play the charade, and Tangos or no
Tangos, go have a look-see, then come straight back and call it a day. There was no way were were going into that pad without first consulting with the T-28 drivers, and working out a basic plan of execution that had a very good chance of success. Besides, we'd already received a message directing us to return to Udorn that night, and we had to leave no later than 4:00 if we were to be there before dark.

We were up against the clock, and Clean encouraged us to launch, and hope the Tangos arrived by the time we reached the pad. We did, they didn't, and we returned to 69A to refuel and head for home, thinking that that was the end of the discussion about going in for those guys that day. But we weren't underway more that 15 minutes when we heard Emmet [Sullivan] leading Suponchai and his partner out to make the pickup.

Emmet successfully got into the pad and picked up the wounded, but his helicopter was shot on the way out. When we heard the action I reversed course with the intention of joining in the rescue, but Emmet couldn't have gone far, because Suponchai & Co. had made the recovery of all who'd been in H-73 after we'd turned around. As I recall, the following day Dave Kendall was there to lead the flight, and while the Tangos bombed the base of the hill, went in to successfully evacuate the position. End of story.

Note: The above assignment was not the regular sort of work we did. The day-to-day work always had some element of risk attached simply because of the environment in which it was conducted, but that risk was at a lower level than the risk incurred while conducting a special. An assignment was considered to be, and was referred to as 'a special,' when we put troops into a position that wasn't secured by other troops already there - or when we extracted troops (or refugees) from a position that was then left undefended and insecure - or when we supported troops in the near proximity of the bad guys. These assignments were conducted on a voluntary basis, and reaped a 'bonus' of $50/landing. However, it must be understood that the bonus was always regarded as a 'thank you,' not as an incentive. No one in his right mind would have taken life threatening risks for fifty bucks.

There were certain standard operating procedures to which we normally adhered when conducting a special. For example, all helicopters were usually dual piloted, and one of them would be designated as SAR, and would remain empty of troops and cargo - it would not normally participate in the depositing or collection of troops, or their supplies. And there would be some sort of fixed-wing cover, with bombs or rockets, and machine-guns to distract the enemy, if encountered. Like a military organization, the senior man present would be responsible for organizing the job, coordinating with the cover aircraft, and led the charge from the pointed end.
I have no knowledge of what was going through Emmet's mind when he attempted to accomplish the task we'd left undone, but he didn't have to take the risk he did, because at least some of the above stated requirements for tackling the job could not be met - he didn't have a co-pilot. The risk at that time was very great [see Jim Rausch incident].

[There was always pressure from case officers when there was particularly risky work to be done. . . But having said that, it must also be said that we were all adults of reasonable intelligence and powers of discretion, who knew the limits of our aircraft's capability, and the limit of our own ability with the machine. So it always boiled down to a simple fact of aviation, that its the captain's responsibility to make the final decision about whether (based on all the known factors) the job can be successfull accomplished. In other words, we frequently had to make value judgments, not only about the task itself, but about the customer as well, and try to determine whether we were being asked to stick our butts into.

Sometime an individual's analysis was correct, sometimes not - but the requirement to make judgments that had life-or-death consequences was always a factor in the equation that (for example, in Pakse in '72 and '73) kept my heartbeat and anxiety at maximum stress levels. I think that if you were to canvass H-34 pilots for an opinion of Leon Williamson [GM commander at Savannakhet], for example, you would find that no one really liked to work with him. From the customer's point of view, Leon was a real hard-charger, and good value for the money - from my perspective he was in the same category as the NVA, and all the others who were intent on getting me killed. I felt I had to be exceptionally careful when working with him, and question everything he asked me to do, because he was always at close quarters with the bad guys (and I felt that he was inclined to withhold information he may have thought would make me jumpy. That thought alone increased my paranoia - but then this paranoid had real enemies."

Sullivan to Larry Sall, 19 May 1972: "Burr Smith lied to me. Had wounded to pickup at LZ on Mekong. I was assured enemy 12.7s had been taken out. Go try (single pilot) with two Thais in SAR bird. I tried to sneak up river valley and pop up to pad. Three 12.7s right under me. Main fuel line shot away. I can't slow down or vapor will reach hot exhaust. I head by Xiang Lom and flare out one ridge line short. GREAT autorotation. Tail wheel hits one foot from hillside and rotor three feet from slope. 177 holes in aircraft. Thai crew picks me up under moderate hostile fire. My crew chief, Freddy Alor, was killed out of Pakse [19 May 1972]. Good and brave man."
March 20, 1972

PC-6C, Fred G. Connelly, with two passengers, hit 15 times by small arms fire in same location as Sullivan. Superficial wound to big toe. Landed safely at LS-69A.

Connor, 272: CC lost on Skyline, then taken back. LS20A had some 130mm incoming last night and again today. CD, CT, CB, CE are no problem for drops but some pilots in the past have been too high for the type chutes onboard the aircraft.

March 28, 1972

UH-34 at LS-54 (Ban Dong Hene), PIC Woodley, F/O Freedman, with six passengers, on short final for helipad when hit by DK-82 fire. Explosion near radio compartment. Autotrotated into rice field in valley near helipad. Passengers and crew got out; aircraft burned.

Freedman, July 5, 1993: Mission was to drop troops on ridgeline. It was late in the day and they went straight in (a mistake). The aircraft was hit in the radio compartment and immediately started burning. No one was injured. They were picked up by Tony Byrne, who dropped off his troops and came back for them.

Connor, 272: C-7A #411 took one 12.7mm in right wing while dropping low level (600 feet) at CT pad; no injuries.

March 30, 1972

Connor, 272: Heavy TIC against Skyline pads all day. Two T-34 tanks destroyed by land mines and air at TG 792169. Incoming getting intense and accurate throughout day in valley and all pads. Forecast: "Probably worse tonight and tomorrow."

March 31, 1972

Connor 272: Attempts made to retake CC, CG, and CW today. Reports vary as to success. Friendly air strike hit friendly force near CC; many casualties. 20A had incoming all day.

April 1972


April 5, 1972
PC5C N195X, pilot Matthew P. Daddio, hit land mine on taking off from LS-90 (Tin Bong). Explosion in aft section of aircraft, which veered left, was engulfed in flames, and destroyed. Daddio suffered penetration wound through right calf. Two of four indigenous passengers, one minor and one serious.

April 6, 1972
Operation Linebacker begins.

April 8, 1972
Leonard I. Wiehrdt, Porter PC-6C N152L flew into ground near Ban Xieng while flying cover for Air American plane that had been shot down. [Hired 1 June 1965; DOB 13 September 1917]

Mauldin: Wiehrdt was a retired USAF full colonel. He was taking pictures of an airplane that had gone down in a rice paddy when his wing hit a tree.

April 14, 1972
Sullivan and Connor have been reporting battle for skyline pads at 20A for the past month. On April 14: Friendlies trying to secure CW and CA pads suffered approx. 5 KIA and 31 WIA. "Enemy has a 'kill zone' around both CA and CW pads using small mortars, and friendlies got caught in these zones. Raven pilots reported the Raven and A-1Es working this TIC received no ground fire, but T-28s took heavy small arms.'"

April 21, 1972
Director of Central Intelligence authorized the divestiture of CIA ownership and control of the Air America complex and Southern Air Transport. Air America was to be retained until the end of the war in Southeast Asia. [Air America in 1976 returned c. $20 million to the Treasury.] (See Church, 241, 248)

Houston: A general shift in thinking at the Agency occurred between 1968 and 1972 as to desirability of maintaining substantial airlift capacity. Records appear to indicate that Houston convinced Director in early 1970s that such capacity was not longer necessary to retain. Houston testified that airlift requirement was disappearing. However, he said that he also reminded Director that things could change. Once liquidated, the capability could not easily be rebuilt "and so you ought to think very, very carefully before getting rid of an asset that did have a contingent capability.'"

April 22, 1972
FEPA was not told about the special missions, and the FEPA members who flew them kept quiet. Kanach and Higgins were strong FEPA members but they loved special missions. Higgins was motivated for this type flying by patriotism; Kanach, whom Knight considers the best helicopter pilot he has ever known, loved the challenge. Kanach was usually the leader of the S-58T missions.

When Knight returned to Udorn, the S-58T special project was already underway under John Ford. Four Hughes 500s were brought out for the project; two were "F" models (hushed) and two were used for cover. Chinese pilots were supposed to fly the "P"s but one crashed during training. Two AAM Saigon pilots were sent back to the US for training. Also, Al Cates took some training in the states. However, the Hughes flew only one mission (out of Takhet).

Most of the missions were flown by the S-58Ts, which were nearly as quiet as the Hughes, and a few by the Bells. They tapped the multiplex lines on the NVA road network, flying missions out of Savannakhet and Takhet. This was a big operation. They used SR-71 photos and Loran printouts. Vopars did photos recon of the area from two months. Kanach, Higgins, and Casterlin were the primary pilots. One pilot used night goggles and the other did not. Navigation was by Loran.

There also were missions to plant sensors in trees. Jim Pearson in a Twin Otter worked on antenna alignment. He remembers one occasion when Flight Mechanic D. K. Kennedy twice had to down into the trees at night to align the antenna. Dick Casterlin was the pilot.

Northern missions operated out of LS-32. LS-444 was a secret training base for the missions, located on a plateau that was NNE of Pakse.

They experiment with night airdrops in the Chinook. Hutchinson/Knight did one mission at night, hovering about 20 minutes, while 60 people exited the aircraft. (Shep Johnson was almost lost out the back at one point during training.)

Buddy Rogers at AB-1 was mainly responsible for these missions.

The special project continued until December 1973. Knight is especially proud of the work done by AAM. They were on the cutting edge of nighttime operations.

The appearance of the SA-7s in the early 1970s "changed the name of the game." AAM had a demonstration with a
captured SA-7. There was a meeting with the pilots. The idea of parachutes came out of this meeting. The Bells were equipped with exhaust deflectors and other methods were used but there was no real counter to the SA-7.

March 19, 1972

Connor, 272: Sam Thong and all pads lost. No contact today with WILD BILL and DOGWOOD. Ground troops knocked out three tanks but at heavy price. [WILD BILL and DOGWOOD later located.]

LS20A: CC pads on ridge of the Big Sky reported lost today. CA had enemy east end of pad today. CG had enemy just outside of wire. Rest of pads had drops via C7A and Twin Otters. Please advise all PIC that contact must be made with customer on 118.3 at LS20A and ground FACS on ridge line. There have been enemy recon units south of LS20A.

Ingham, Jan. 7, 1993: "FAC WILD BILL was recruited by me out of the ranks of the Thai volunteers. I was with BC 609 (all of the officers and NCOs in this unit came from the Thai Marine Corps) one day, and one of the troops greeting me in English. I stopped to talk to him, fund that his English was pretty good, and asked him if he wanted to be a FAC. He said yes and turned out to be a good one. Unfortunately, he was killed in Sam Thong when the jeep he was in ran over an antitank mine - no doubt one put there by friendlies."

March 19, 1972

UH-34 H73, E.R. Sullivan, returning to LS 274 (Xiang Lom) [also known as LS69B] with five psgrs when hit by small arms fire. Damage to main fuel line. Flown toward friendly location. Autorotated into clearing when engine stopped.

Fred Frahm to WML, 1 Aug 92:

Frahm began working the Ban Houi Sai/Xiang Lom area on March 16. "From the 16th through the 18th it was business as usual - resupplying the troops occupying the hilltop positions in the area. But on the morning of the 19th Mister Clean [Burr Smith] informed us that a position overlooking the Mekong (QB-0790) had been attacked during the night, and was now surrounded by Pathet Lao troops - and that the position on a hilltop only a couple of miles to the west was under similar threat of attack. He confided that he didn't think we'd be able to get into the first pad because of the known enemy presence there, but wanted us to evacuate the troops under threat before an attack became a reality. He'd already ordered up, and was now waiting for some T-28 cover to come down from Ban Houi Sai to join in the effort."
Message from COU, Pakse, commending Hal Miller and T.A. Richie for "outstanding rescue mission" on night of April 22. "Under extremely adverse weather conditions and without accompanying choppers, crew of H-62 located downed pilot (Vampire-50) at approximately 2300 hours local time. Vampire-50 was forced to abandon his aircraft when he lost control of the plane in a severe thunderstorm."

Knight to Miller, 30 May 72: "Your unselfish actions on the night of 22 April 1972 ... reflect the highest standards of aviation professionalism. It is very probable that a life was saved as a result of your heroic deed and you are hereby commended for your actions." [Miller File, AAM Archives]

April 24, 1972

Lloyd Randell and nine passengers killed in Porter PC-6C N391R at Moung Cha, enroute from 20A to LS-113. Flew into mountain in bad weather.

Mauldin: Jake Wehrell was supposed to give Randell a check ride. He had observed him and thought that he was taking too many chances. He was killed a day or two before the ride was scheduled. Happy Parker, who had a good feel for people, said that Randell had a death wish. He was not wearing his shoulder harness at the time of the accident.

Dan Williams: Randell often came back to Long Tieng with bullet holes in his aircraft. On April 23, he came in with nine bullet holes, including one the size of your fist. He warned Randell to be careful. Randell replied that "Those little bastards are never going to get me."

April 25, 1972

Lengthy telex from AVFGO/DFP TPE to all Chief Pilots, with instructions to distribute copies to all flight crews. Message cites recent fatalities (Cruz, Houp, Franklin, Mulliolland, Clark, Thutmanon, Ritter, Townley, Weissenback, Khamphanh, Sousadalay, Wiehrdt, Randell).

"It is with deep personal regret that eye confirm the tragic loss of another AAM pilot yesterday. The past few months have produced an appalling toll in lives and serious injuries. In light of these events, I ask that each flight crew member and each supervisor reappraise all the factors which make flying in our operation a particularly unforgiving profession. We are called upon to perform under possibly the most difficult environmental conditions in the world considering the combination of remote, mountainous terrain, absence of modern navigation/communications and air traffic control facilities, active presence of hostile armed forces, absence of adequate means of reporting and forecasting the varied seasonal weather and winds, and
marginal airfields and landing zones, to name a few examples. Additionally it must be recognized that performance of support functions such as maintenance, traffic, flight watch, etc. must be accomplished under equally trying, although different circumstances. These activities, operating under pressure have very real problem areas of their own, for which crew members must be on constant alert. The key element which most often determines the difference between success or failure of each flight is the judgement of the individual crew member. Your evaluation of the total situation including the condition of the aircraft and its equipment, your personal physical and mental state, and the relative urgency of the mission in addition to the factors cited above culminates in a decision as to whether or not the mission should be attempted under the circumstances. That responsibility is of utmost importance, even though such decisions must be made many times each day and thousands of times in a lifetime of flying. The price for only one erroneous assessment of these ingredients all too often is fatal. It is incumbent on each member of the flying division to exercise alertness to recognize when support, environmental, and personal factors have combined to produce a risky or hazardous situation requiring the maximum performance by the aircraft or its crew, to exercise sufficient self-discipline and maturity X refused mission which require such maximum performance except under life or death circumstances, and to understand that continued acceptance of high risk operations, except under unusual circumstances, can only lead to further accidents and human tragedy, and in the long run, failure to meet customer requirements. The recent accidents would make it indelibly clear in your mind, as it has mine, that violation of these concepts does have such results. With great respect to the memories of the following crew members who have been lost or missing since 1 January 1971, I ask each of you to give this matter your most serious consideration.

May 1, 1972
Sullivan reports runway at 20A now opened to C-130s; one landed today without incident. T-28s probably will commence operating during daylight hours. Support facilities being readied.

Early May 1972
Parker (MULIE) assigned to Hmong GM 22, replacing RINGO. The GM was south of the PDJ, dug in across a valley from a ridgeline controlled by the NVA. About this time, LS-272 flooded, hastening return to Long Tieng and reoccupation of Sky compound.

May 11, 1972
Sullivan reports that friendlies are now reported in control of Sam Thong.

May 12, 1972
Telephone interview with Steven Neal, February 22, 1993:

Neal, a Raven FAC, was flying an O-1 on the morning of May 12, 1972. He had been briefed at LS-20A, picked up a local as a backseater, then flown up the eastern side of the PDJ to the northeast corner, near Highway 7. As he reached the area, smoke began to come out of the cowling and under the dash. He headed south, as Raven Gregg Wilson, also flying that morning, came towards him. As the smoke increased, he shut off the engine. The smoke stopped, but a landing on the PDJ meant almost certain capture or death. He started the engine again and was able to maintain enough power to extend his glide. As he approached the southeast corner of the PDJ, he headed down a draw between high mountains whose peaks belonged to the NVA. At this point, his engine quit, and he made a deadstick landing into an unused rice paddy that was covered to 6-foot tall elephant grass. He hit a covered dike at an angle, crumpling both wings of the aircraft. He sustained a cut knee; the backseater was uninjured. By this time, Wilson was overhead. He had called LS-272 and been told that Air America had a Loach in the area. The Loach arrived a few minutes later and circled the downed aircraft. By this time, Neal and the backseater had moved some 200-300 yards away. Talking through Wilson on his survival radio, he directed the Loach to their location. The floor of the Loach hit the local about chest-high. With adrenaline pumping, Wilson lifted the local into the aircraft with one hand—and nearly threw him out the other side. Neal did not get the name of the Air America pilot, but he owes him a steak dinner.

May 14, 1972
UH-34 R. J. Lister LS-177 (Ban Moung) hit by ground fire while working sling load in area.

May 13, 1972

May 19, 1972
President Nixon writes to Amb. Godley: "The Communist dry season in Laos has been blunted this year, largely
through the tireless efforts of your Mission. You have done a tremendous job under difficult conditions . . ."

Godley encloses copy of letter to "All American Employees of the Mission," on June 10. {m}
June 1972

Eight Boeing Vertol CH-47Cs assigned to Udorn.

Burke: Burke served as chief pilot R/W in 1972. He designated two assistant chief pilots: W.R. Hutchinson was for heavy helicopters (Chinooks) and Hal Miller for light helicopters (UH-1 and Bells). He recalls that there were problems when the Bells first arrived. The pilots were used to the UH-1, which they could land overgrounded without much problem. But the Bells, with different airframes and skids, could not be subjected to such abuse. As a result, there were a lot of accidents at first. Air America hired new people for the Bells, mainly ex-Army with Bell experience. He remembers Nikki Fillipi (hired 6/21/67), a meticulous, conscientious pilot. At one point, he made Fillipi an instructor. This was a mistake. Although good with beginners, he was a disaster with experienced pilots. He used to receive a lot of complaints from customers that the pilots were not doing their job. In almost every case, the customer was making unrealistic demands on the pilots. The customer also tried to pressure younger pilots into flying into hazardous situations. It was not a pleasant time. He recalls an incident involving one of the Thai pilots (Saraporn - December 25, 1967), a good, experienced individual. He was operating in the southern part of Laos when a strip came under attack and radio contact was lost. Despite the high probability that the strip had been overrun, the customer sent his there the next day without saying a word. Expecting a routine mission, he landed at the strip. The enemy opened fire, damaging the helicopter and wounding the pilot in the shoulder. He managed to take off a fly a few miles before crashing. He was rescued.

Burke found it difficult to get proper support. He had ground rules to the effect that pilots would fly into hazardous areas only with proper support, but this often created problems. For example, one day [in the mid-1960s] a call came in that a USAF pilot who had been shot down and captured several months before and managed to escape and had contacted friendly elements in the Sam Neua area. Burke and Nunez were to go in and look for him. Burke wanted air cover as the helicopters would have to cross a dangerous supply road that was covered by mobile 37mm guns. Arrangements were made for cover, but as Navy fighters came up on the frequency that wanted to know what the score was. Burke asked the pilots to make runs on the road to distract the enemy while the helicopters crossed. They responded with a "Who the hell are you?" After a futile attempt to
explain, the Navy left. Burke and Nunez went in anyway but never were able to contact the pilot.

[Knight: "I returned to chief pilot job from school in 1972, when I was promoted to director of operations. I again selected Burke as assistant."

Joseph M. Glasgow to WML, 28 Jan 93: "AAM provided air transport (rotor and fixedwing) to move personnel and materials throughout Laos. Generally, I would guess about 75-80% of the flights were administrative in nature and composition (of the cargo). However, from about 1971 to the end, the NVA was in control of most of the Bolovens and the routes from North Vietnam thru Laos to SVN, making most of AAM's sorties from Savannakhet and Pakse to units and sites to the east exciting and sometimes outright dangerous. As you know, in 1972 the NVA halved their main-force presence in MR II when the 312th Division was deployed to SVN. While that reduced their personnel strength, their fire power appeared to remain static. Air America's presence in MRS I and II, though reduced a little, continued to provide support to units and personnel in villages and positions behind North Vietnamese lines. Following the NVA successes in MR II in late 1971 and early 1972, they did not elect to draw back to safe havens during the wet season and posed a continuous threat to AAM (on top of the Delta Sierra weather). With the advent of the cease fire and the arrival of the CH-47 in the AAM inventory much was accomplished with the big bird, oying trees from surrounding hills into Bouam Long for the lumber mill, repositioning large irregular forces to close-in sites for easy access to FAR officers who rapidly signed them up as regular soldiers (allegedly to preclude a postwar effort by the Communists to try and convict guerrilla troops, especially Hmong, as criminals. You may be aware of the 'seat belt' problem facing the customer and pilots. Moving large passenger loads in aircraft that could not accommodate the numbers with individual seats and belts required a special waiver for VTE/Udorn.

Relationships between pilots and customers varied in the MRe. In MR I (except Nam U), III, and IV, customers lived with the families in quarters or, the bachelors and TDIers lived in secure BOQs. Air America had their own hostel and little after hours comraderie took place. In MR II, however, in the 70s and after the USAF leveled the Long Tieng 'Sky' compound and the NVA chased everyone down to Ban Xon, L6-272 customers and pilots shared mess hall and bunk space as available at Long Tieng. Some customers, me for one, viewed many of the the older pilots, a few with over 20,000 hours, as smart, crafty, exceptionally competent and who did not object challenging the NVA."
June 12, 1972
James E. Rausch killed in H-34 H-85 at Ban Houei. Aircraft took one round of small arms fire through windshield while hovering for a sling pickup in a hot zone. Rausch hit in head and killed instantly. Copilot Manas completed departure. [Knight: Manas promoted to captain following this flight.]

June 14, 1972
FIC VTE/UTH to FIC LS32: "Customer recap of LS32 situation: trail activity east of LS32 appears 50-100 enemy at most, forces observed so far do not appear to be in significant strength to mount a very stiff attack on LS32 basis area. There is still no significant enemy trail activity to the west and southwest of LS32 and there has been no TIC between patrol elements covering traditional enemy approaches. Meo staff officers feel the enemy does not have enough ammo stored up for a sustained siege type attack, and that commando type sapper raid like last year's would be suicidal and much less effective due improved defensive perimeters."

July 1, 1972
Air America has 138 pilots at VTE and 147 at Udorn.

Parker: Sometime during summer, RINGO, BAG, and Dick Johnson left. CLEAN replaced BAG as assistant to HOG. No one was scheduled to replacing RINGO and DIGGER, as war was winding down. ZACK temporarily replaced Johnson as chief of unit. An ex-Marine from WWII/Korea, he had service with Agency in Vietnam and in Southern Laos. Unassuming, he was an excellent complement to HOG.

July 2, 1972
DHC-6 vicinity LS 289 (Khong Sedone) hit by one round of 23mm high explosive while on drop mission. AFD B. Khouanxay lost two toes on left foot.

July 16, 1972
Feliciano C. Manaio, F/M, H-34 H-52 killed near Pakse. Aircraft enroute to LZ for emergency medevac. One-half mile from LZ at 150 feet above terrain, aircraft came under large caliber enemy fire. One round hit Manaio in head. Pilots: Sullivan and Hagerman.

Jess C. Hagerman to WML, August 28, 1991 (tape):

The background of this incident related to FEPA. FEPA was a good organization that brought pilots a lot of benefits; however, the seniority-based system could be a problem. Emmett Sullivan had been flying Bells in Saigon when he transferred to Udorn. Because he was senior to
Hagerman, he was made PIC on H-34s despite limited time in the aircraft and unfamiliarity with the area. On July 16 they were doing medevacs for local troops. Generally, there are two ways to approach an area. If there was no incoming fire, you flew over high, then made a tight spiral to the landing area. When there was fire coming in, you flew overhead, spiraled down some distance away, then flew low to the LZ. The situation on the 16th was an emergency medevac, with the field under fire. They saw the smoke from the landing area, spiraled down some distance away, and began a low level approach. Hagerman realized that the aircraft was off course. He informed Sullivan of the problem, pointing across his face to the right, and saying, "That's were we have to go." Just at this time, a quad-barreled .50-cal. machine gun opened up to the left of the helicopter.
Sullivan turned away but started to climb instead of descending further and hugging the contour of the terrain. With every fifth round a tracer, it looked like there was a stream of water coming up toward the aircraft. They took one hit, the round entered from the left. Flight Mechanic Manolo was hit in head and killed instantly.

July 22, 1972
Airdrops being relocated to Lima 16 (Van Vieng) following flooding of LS 272 (Ban Xon)

July 25, 1972
Benjamin F. Coleman, John T. Grover, Thonom Khanthaphengxay killed in BHC-6 H5662 near Tha Tam Bleung. Aircraft hit side of hill in bad weather. AFD S. Kingkland survived. Aircraft on resupply flight for troops in contact and was attempting to fly under low ceiling when he hit the ground.

Rhyne: "We never knew what really caused it." There were three Otters trying to drop that morning. Bob Clark of CASI went in first. He approached the "V" leading to the valley, realized that he could not proceed, and made a sharp turn (the stall warning horn sounded during the turn). Coleman followed close behind. He also had to make a sharp turn below the clouds. Rhyne believes that he likely ran into Clark's vortex. Clark saw him hit the ground.

Rhyne recalls taking a company car to call on Doris Coleman. The appearance of Rhyne in a company car was a clear signal. She was working in the yard. She looked up and said, "He's dead, isn't he?" [Mrs. Rhyne recalled that the time between 5 and 7 p.m. at Vientiane was the "panic hours." The wives would get anxious and call the office, asking when their husbands would be returning. Rhyne recalls 1972 as "the worst year we ever had." One of his duties was to notify the wives (acting when Cunningham was
August 17, 1972

“Aircraft Accident/Incident Report,” C-123K, 55-4555,” CIA Corporate Files, Box 61

PIC Reeves, F/O Gudahl, AFDs, crashed into a ridge line north of Ban Nammeui in poor weather while enroute to 20A on a scheduled flight from Vang Vieng (L-16) with five passengers and 13,500 pounds of palletized ordnance. This was flight 300 – “local commuter.” F/O Kingsley was scheduled to go on the flights but he return late on August 26 and was replaced by the standby F/O. This was the last flight from L-16 at 1650. Cargo was 300 palletized propellant charges for 155mm howitzer, eight warheads for the 155, a box of 30 body bags, and five indigenous passengers (one child). The aircraft impacted on a steep slope and burned rather than exploded. Reeves was “a quiet, unassuming individual who followed instructions explicitly without comment or complaint.” Probable cause: Pilot error – but no real reason why it should have happened.
Mike Ingham, Jan. 7, 1993: "I was in a chopper in the area and went right after this accident with my Thai ops assistant (SMALLMAN) and the flight mech. from the chopper and got Coleman out of the wreckage. He was still alive when we put him on the chopper but died on the way to the hospital. As we got him out he kept telling us that he could not breath and that he wanted to sit up. I think that his chest had been crushed. The copilot was obviously dead and firmly trapped in the wreckage so we made no attempt to get his body out. The kicker's foot was trapped in the wreckage and we had a hell of a time getting him out. As the area we were in was not secure, AVGAS was all over the place, and the electrical system of the plane was shorted out and arcing, I entertained thoughts of cutting the kicker's foot off. Fortunately it did not come to that."

Stan Wilson, Feb. 10, 1993: Wilson, Al Reagan, and small team of mechanics were flown into the crash site by Kanach on July 26. They recovered the "black boxes" of the sophisticated electronic gear on the Otter and the body of the copilot.

[T. J. Thompson believes that Coleman was dropping on Jim Barber's position. See comments by Rome, 13 Nov 71.]

August 7, 1972
Sullivan, Vang Vieng: Temporary FIC being established on flight line. All maps/supplies lost in 272 flood.

August 13, 1972
French Smith trains with infra-red glasses.
[Knight: Frenchy's goggle training was short lived. He was unsuitable.]

August 27, 1972
William E. Reeves, Joel M. Gudahl, Praves Satarakij, and Thongkham Khanmanephit killed in C-123K 55-4555 at Vang Vieng. Aircraft enroute from Vang Vieng to 20A with 12,000 pounds of ordnance and five passengers when it hit a hill, 20 feet below ridgeline, in bad weather.

August 31, 1972
Sullivan, Vang Vieng: FIC still at Vang Vieng but possibility of relocating back to 20A.

August 1972
VP attempts to relieve pressure on 20A and secure foothold on PDJ before anticipated ceasefire. Commando Raider company parachuted north on PDJ on night of
August 14. Two heliborne guerrilla regiments link up with them the next morning and drive south in poor weather. Accidental B-52 strike on friendly forces. Mini-offensive ends in September.

James E. Parker:

Plans were developed to reequip and retrain the GMs to recapture the PDJ. Parker and DIGGER took their GMs to the training facility that was run by Tony Po. The GMs came back to Long Tieng in early September (August?). TAHN returned with his GM from NRI; BEAR arrived with his GM from MR III. KAYAK had two Hmong GMs; CLEAN had the remaining GMs. BAMBOO had the commandos. Parker’s GM moved north to LS-15; KAYAK’s force was taken by helicopter into positions east of the PDJ. As a diversion, DIGGER’s GM was to be placed into the northwest corner of the PDJ, along Route 6, near Moung Phanh. B-52s prepped the area, then a small group of BAMBOO’s commandos were inserted by Air America (in terrible weather) in the evening to set up landing lights. The remaining Commandos parachuted in from an AAM C-130 to secure the area (77 men jumped without injury). Parker’s GM then began moving out of LS-15, while KAYAKs GMs headed north toward the PDJ. TAHN and BEAR were in reserve at Long Tieng. There was no resistance for three days. Following contact with the NVA, TAHN’s GM was brought in by helicopter. Due to confusion, TAHN was left with his GM overnight. The NVA overran the position that night, and TAHN was killed. (TAHN was a University of Washington graduate who had served in Vietnam with the USMC combat engineers.) Vang Pao and HOG went out at first light with a company of Vang Pao’s best soldiers, retook the position, and brought out TAHN’s body.

[Ingham: Seaborge was killed by a B40 rocket that landed right in front of his fighting hole. His body was recovered by a chopper flight mech by the name of Bob Noble.]

Parker’s GM eventually gained the western edge of the PDJ against light resistance. He sent patrols onto the plateau, but then pulled back after running into an old mine field. The unit remained in position as bait for an NVA attack. When in came, the area was socked in due to unseasonable haze. Parker and DIGGER put up a good fight, then pulled back. A Raven was shot down during the time period.

O’Dell to WML, 5 January 1993:

"GM 21 and I think GM22 went to Thailand for training by the Special Forces during summer ’72. Mule and I were at

6
Pits Camp, Thailand, for 8 weeks. Then we returned, GM 21 was involved in the operation re retake the PDJ.

That operation began with a pathfinder team inserted onto the PDJ and then a Commando Raider parachute jump. GM 21, with me on board, went into the zone early that morning via USAF helos. The offensive was bogged down and we took some pretty heavy casualties. I don't remember the B-52 strikes but there was a lot of rain and we had an unusually high amount of immersion foot and trench foot. I remember being in a Porter trying to run a medevac when one of the AAM helos took a lot of ground fire. The ground FAG had assured us that it was all clear before the helo went in. I humbly apologized to the pilot after it was all over. He had no hard feelings about it; he knew if I'd thought it was dangerous I'd have asked for air cover or, if it just didn't make sense, we wouldn't have done it. This was my last operation with GM 21.

Glerum to WML, 4 January 1993:

"While I am on the subject of USAF support, you may have heard of the operation (Phu Keng on the western edge of the PDJ) which to me best exemplified the difficulty of marrying our 'irregular' war with an air support capability hobbled by an enormous array of restrictive ground rules. We had been living for years with the USAF requirement that all HLZ's used by their armed and armored heavy lift helicopters be 'secured' - usually by first sending in several of the unarmed AAM choppers with a few troops, and often a project officer. In the case of Phu Keng, we knew that beyond any shadow of doubt a first light landing of the 1000 man GM we wanted to move would be unopposed. Because of the size of the movement and number of USAF resources involved, the USAF would not accept what HLZ security we could provide via AAM and backed out - virtually at the eleventh hour. Our solution was to insert a commando raider team via night capable AAM S-58's and have the commando raiders light up at DZ for a night C-130 drop of circa 100 troops, most of whom had had no parachute training, to 'secure' the HLZ's. Somewhat to our surprise, the operation worked out perfectly and the USAF moved the GM the following morning without incident."

September 1972
Ray Seaborg, case officer (radio call sign TAHN), killed on southern end of PDJ near Lat Sen. Seaborg was one of three CIA case officers killed in Laos in 1972. The total KIA was six (not counting O'Jibway and Johnson).

September 1972
CIA Inspector General reports on investigation of drug trafficking by air proprietaries. "The [Church] Committee
investigated this area to determine whether there is any evidence to substantiate these charges. On the basis of its examination, the Committee has concluded that the CIA air proprietaries did not participate in illicit drug trafficking."

CIA launched full-scale inquiry in 1972. IG interviewed "a score of officers at CIA headquarters who had served in Asia and were familiar with the problems related to drug trafficking." IG then dispatched investigators to Southeast Asia. Between August 24 and September 10, the group visited Hong Kong and eleven agency facilities in Southeast Asia, interviewing more than 100 representatives of CIA, State, AID, Bureau of Narcotics, US Customs Service, Army, and Air America. IG’s report concluded that there was "no evidence that the Agency, or any senior officer of the Agency, has ever sanctioned or supported drug trafficking as a matter of policy. Also, we found not the slightest suspicion, much less evidence, than any Agency officer, staff or contract, has ever been involved in the drug business. With respect to Air America, we found that it has always forbidden, as a matter of policy, the transportation of contraband goods aboard its aircraft. We believe that its Security Inspection Service, which is used by the cooperating air transport company as well, is now serving as an added deterrent to drug traffickers."

"The record before the Inspector General clearly established that official United States policy deplored the use of opium as a narcotic in Southeast Asia, but regarded it as a problem for local governments." Neo troops were ejected from various camps when they were caught using the drug; however, IG Report noted: "We did not, however, attempt to prevent its use among the civilian population in those areas where we exercised military control, believing that such intervention would have been resisted by the tribes with whom we were working and might have even resulted in their refusal to cooperate." Nor did Agency interfere with movement of opium from hills to markets in cities farther south. IG Report: "The war has clearly been our overriding priority in Southeast Asia and all other issues have taken second place in the scheme of things. It would be foolish to deny this, and we see no reason to do so." CIA case officer (1966-68) said that he "was under orders not to get too deeply involved in opium matters since his primary mission was to get on with the war and not risk souring relations with his indigenous military counterparts by investigation of opium matters."

Re Air America: AAM regulations contained injunction against smuggling as early as 1957 (later included opium). IG; "Air America has had a few cases of this kind (all of which are documented in the files in the Agency) and has, in each case, taken prompt and decisive action upon their discovery." - Opium did get onboard Air America aircraft on
occasion, but this usually happened in chaotic circumstances where no inspection was possible. "While it was true that narcotics had been found aboard some of their aircraft, in almost every case the small quantity involved could only have been for the personal use of the possessor." IG: "Given the strict anti-contraband regulations under which these two airlines have been operating for years, it is highly unlikely that any pilot would knowingly have permitted narcotics or any other contraband aboard his aircraft."

"Although they noted, ‘if it is a truism to say that they’re in the business for the money,’ the investigators concluded that these pilots were deeply committed to their job, and that the subject of drugs was a much an anathema to them as it is ‘to any decent, respectable citizen in the United States.’"

"The milieu in which these pilots found themselves did serve to evoke images of them as mercenaries or soldiers of fortune. The Inspector General indicated that ‘a number of them do like their wine and women, but on the job they are all business and very much like the average American.’"

IG could not be as confident about the conduct of other employees with easy access to aircraft. Several instances of these employees fired because they were suspected of handling drugs.

IG: "In recent testimony to Agency officers in Vientiane, Laotian officials who had been involved in the drug business stated that there was no need for drug traffickers to use Air America facilities because they had their own. We certainly found this to be true. In addition to the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF), there are several commercial airlines in Laos, including Royal Air Lines, Lao Air Development, Air Laos, and perhaps others, all of which evidently have ties with high Laotian government officials. It is highly problematical whether these airlines have a full platter of legitimate business."

Another factor making Air America less desirable was the lack of pre-arranged, regular flights schedules. "Ordinarily, the pilot did not know until he reported for duty which airplane he would be flying or what his flight schedule would be for the day."

William A. Colby interview with Gittinger: Opium was commonly grown throughout Laos. "Certainly we didn’t go as our first priority to eliminate the growth of poppy seeds. We kind of ignored it. Later we tried to wean these people over on to other forms of livelihood." "We made a point that we would not be involved in the transport of any of this stuff, and we did successfully, I think, keep it off our airplanes." There were a couple of "minor incidental exceptions" when pilots were caught with small quantities. The real source of the opium problem was in Vientiane. As
the use of drugs became a problem in Vietnam, CIA placed greater emphasis on operations against the traders. They finally drove the factories over the border into Burma. CIA developed assets that would tell when the caravans were coming, then the Thais were pushed into attacking them. "But the business of our being involved in supporting the opium trade is absolute hogwash. It's just not so."

Colby notes that Lester Wolff of the House in 1972 or 1973 conducted an investigation into CIA involvement in the opium trade and reported that there was not truth to the charge. Wolff is "no patsy for anybody."

Richard Helms interview with Gittinger: "I have no doubt that the Meos trafficked in drugs at various times, but they did not do it with the CIA's blessing or the CIA's connivance." Re the charge that Air America was involved: "There may have been a little bit of this, but I can assure you that they were very brave and courageous fellows who flew those Air America helicopters and planes. They landed in fields that you would never regard as air fields. They were doing this constantly, and they were supporting troops under fire. They were an extremely able bunch of airmen, there is not doubt about it, and if one of two of them got off the reservation at some time or other, I don't know the merits of the case. But I do know that the agency was not conniving or condoning any drug smuggling" The charge of CIA complicity in the drug traffic "probably irritates me more than any of the allegations against the agency." "We never were!" People who ran the agency and those who worked on the operational side all over the world "were perfectly decent Americans." The allegations are "irresponsible."

Joseph Westermeyer, Poppies, Pipes, and People: Opium and Its Use in Laos (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Westermeyer is probably the foremost authority on the subject. He lived in Laos from 1967 to 1967 as a USAID physician, then made frequent visits to Laos between 1971 and 1975, studying the use of opium. He visited all provinces except one in far north and one in far south. Author (or coauthor) on 38 scholarly papers on subject.

Westermeyer makes point that use of opium was commonplace in Hmong society; it was used as a medium of exchange. However, Hmong involvement in opium commerce (1965-1975) was "entrepreneurial and extragovernmental." He often heard rumors of high-level Hmong leaders being involved in opium trade; however, despite his proximity to several high-schalon leaders, "I have no data to support these allegations." (p. 50) Chinese merchants and several high ranking Lao officers were involved in the drug trade; they made the money, not the growers.
The primary function of opium in Laos was "an economic one." It served as the primary cash crop for Hmong and Yao. Growing poppy was "a laborious and risky undertaking." Given the opportunity, the tribespeople readily abandoned poppy culture for any other work, crop, or animal husbandry that offered the same or greater profit. (p.53)

"American-owned airlines never knowingly transported opium in or out of Laos, nor did their American pilots ever profit from its transport. Yet undoubtedly every plane in Laos carried opium at some time, unknown to the pilot and his superiors - just as had virtually every pedicab, every Mekong River sampan, and every missionary's jeep between China and the Gulf of Siam." (p.51)

Sentiment against the war in Vietnam linked American presence and opium commerce. Sensationalism and faulty logic characterized reports. Several American writers made brief visits to Laos, obtained second- and third-hand reports, then reached the conclusion that the real evil in Southeast Asia was "American governmental support of opium production and trade." Some writers were academics without training in field research or experience in Laos. Their writings include "a scattering of facts, a good deal of false information, considerable innuendo, and some very faulty logic." The popularity of their works was "a sign of the times." Careful work by reputable researchers was denounced "as mere effluvia by the Central Intelligence Agency." "It was a time when trash was glorified as enlightenment and excellent work having humanitarian import was denounced as treason." (pp. 152-54)

Jess C. Hagerman to WML, August 28, 1991 (tape):

In 1971, Hagerman was involved in a drug raid in Northern Thailand. He had just arrived at Ban Houei Sai when some customers showed up who had flown over a village in a Porter and were talking about signs of a possible heroin manufacturing site. Hagerman said, "We ought to go raid it." Shortly thereafter, he heard that orders had come down from the White House to conduct such a raid. He flew local military people to a LZ close to the village. When they entered the village, they found a first class heroin operation, including a 10 KW diesel generator, lab, chemicals, etc. There were no opposition or activity. Hagerman hauled out some of the chemicals, powdered debris, and machinery. A large store of chemicals in drums was blown up with a grenade launcher.

October 1972
LTC Raymond C. Mullen, Jr. arrives Laos (remains until April 1974). Mullen with Project 404 (296 Army and USAF personnel). MR I: HQ at Luang Prabang; one 404 officer and 4/5 NCOs -- MR II: HQ Long Tieng; one Army and one USAF
officer; "strictly observers" "It was a CIA operation." --
MR III: HQ Savannahket; FAR show; a few 404 officers with
FAR and at Airborne Training Center at Seno -- MR IV: HQ
Pakse; situation close to but not as extreme as Long Tieng --
MR V: HQ 4 miles east of VTE at Camp Chaimo; 90 percent
FAR and 10 percent FAN. Mullen was in charge of MR V,
reporting to Col. Broodus Bailey, the military attaché in
VTE.

Upon arrival, he took orientation flight of MR V in
CASI Porter, stopping where there was at least one FAN or
FAR battalion HQ: Paksane, Ba Keun, Muang Phone, Vang
Vieng, Muang Kasi, Sala Phu Khoun, Sannakhan. Vang Vieng
was a good sized town with USAID, long airstrip, hospital
run by Filipinos, a CIA camp south of town, and a leper
colony run by French priests also south of town. When he
arrived, there was a battle being fought a few kilometers
east of Sala Phu Khoun. Two FAR brigades (245 men each)
were surrounded. Mullen arranged to evacuate one by
helicopter; the other walked out.

FAR and FAN were led by their own officers and neither
group was very aggressive. Thai mercenary force (most
recruited from northern Thailand and more Lao than Thai)
"couldn't spell offense." Lao mercenaries from Bolovens
Plateau were led by CIA officers and were "tigers." CIA
case officers "tactically not too proficient" but they
"lacked nothing when it came to courage." They were mostly
former US military; most hated US regular military.

[O'Dell: He replaced REDCOAT (who went home) at LS-32
for two months. He stayed for two months and was replaced
by Kayak (?). O'Dell returned to Washington and worked on
the Lao desk until September 1973.]

October 2, 1972

Story by Richard Pyle in Pacific Stars & Stripes:
Pyle with a group of reporters invited to visit Long Tieng.
Vang Pao's view of military situation in north-central Laos
"is a sober one." VP: 'We must take back the Plan of Jars
this year. If we do not, maybe we lose Long Cheng. If we
lose Long Cheng, then we cannot stay in Vientiane.' VP says
that weather is crucial factor. 'If good, then we get good
support. If no good, we have problem.' VP is conducting a
four-pronged operation around the fringes of the PDJ, hoping
to regain territory lost ten months ago when Communists
launched fiercest assault of the war. VP's short range
objective is to restore a more favorable military balance of
power before the dry season begins in three months. His
long term objective is to restore the Hmong to their
mountain homes. US officials acknowledge that his drive has
bogged down. One senior official: 'He can't win back the
plain. The best he can hope for is to deny it to the other
side.' Diversion of US air power to fighting in South
Vietnam, plus intensified bombing of North Vietnam, has meant less firepower for Laos. Airstrip at Long Tieng is "humming," with up to 500 landings a day. Leader of T-28 squadron is Vang Sue, who claims more than 3,150 combat missions.

October 7, 1972

Story by Frances Starner in Far Eastern Economic Review: 136,000 Hmong refugees are at Ban Xon (LS-272), east of Van Vieng. Ban Xon also temporary site for CIA operations and sophisticated electronic equipment formerly at Long Tieng. It was moved there in December/January when 20A was threatened. At Ban Xon, intelligence and refugees program, traditionally separated, are now together, and in each other's way. The medical facilities are strained. Also, air traffic problems. Earlier, a 40-bed medical facility was put into operation at Na Moh (LS-207), built as a backup for Long Tieng, but Na Moh was isolated by the NVA offensive and everything moved to Ban Xon. On July 20/21, a flash flood severely damaged the airstrip at Ban Xon. At the end of the month, it was announced that "military logistic support" would move to Van Vieng. Meanwhile, Vang Fao/PAR maintains tenuous hold on Long Tieng and Sam Phong. There is strong evidence that NVA troops have been diverted to South Vietnam. The inability of government forces to capitalize on this during the current rainy season bodes ill for the future.

October 19, 1972

UH-34s:

- H52 (Stergar), H62 (Com-Intra), H59 (Lopes), H89 (Thompson); vicinity of L44 (Saravane);
- H62 destroyed by fire; Boonrat Com-Intra suffering from shock but OK; CP S. Swangpunt lost toe.
- H59 took numerous hits; CP R. N. Huntsberger has serious gunshot wound in groin area.
- H89 has hole in carburetor

H62 received intense hostile fire when 20 feet off the ground with seven passenger. Caught fire. Engine quit. Autorotated. H59 and H89 suffered battle damage while rescuing personnel from H62.

Stergar: On October 14, 2 USAF Ponies (HH-3s) and six AAM UH-34s departed LS-418 [Phou Lat Seu, a training camp and staging area northwest of Pakse at the junction of the Mekong and Mekong Nam Mun rivers] to shuttle a large Lao force to the Saravane airfield to cut enemy lines of communication in this vital area. The Ponies took some hits and refused to insert another shuttle. Air America did the job. After the Lao troops got pounded, Air America was called in to evacuate wounded. No fighter cover or FAC was provided. Stergar landed first, loaded a half dozen severely wounded
soldiers, plus head customer "Leon" [Williamson] and his Lao counterpart, made a running takeoff because of the load, and staggered into the air. They began to take incoming fire. While proceeding back to LS-418, Lopes asked him to turn around and assist Com-Intra, who had gone down. Stergar advised that Thompson was in an empty ship and would be better for SAR. Lopes, despite a ship full of wounded, elected to turn around. He wanted to offload the wounded at Saravane and then get Com-Intra. When he got over the field boundary, he received many hits, wounding Huntsberger. Meanwhile, Thompson successfully picked up Com-Intra and crew.

"We continued to support Group Mobiles in the area for months. The enemy brought in a lot of AAA and none of us looked forward to a Pakse assignment without cover."

Conboy: This was a large operation, involving two GMs and some 800 troops. One GM was advised by Leon Williamson and one by John Peterson. They were inserted on the morning of October 19 by USAF helicopters. Later in the day, Air America was called in to evacuate the two CIA advisers and others.

Angelo Spelios: Spelios was in a group of five Army-trained pilots hired in May 1971. He was assigned to Saigon, flying routine "ash-and-trash" supply missions for the senior provincial adviser, with a few "Embassy" missions. Transferred to Udorn in August 1972, he saw a big change: flying now was mostly direct combat support, carrying troops and ammunition.

On October 19, Spelios was flying copilot for H. J. Thompson. There was a four-ship operation to extract troops under heavy pressure from the enemy. Thompson was the SAR bird, orbiting empty and ready to go down if one of the other helicopters got into trouble. The troops were on an airstrip in the vicinity of L-44. There were A-1s for cover and a L-19 FAC. Stergar and Lopes made pickups, then Com-Intra went in. He watched as Com-Intra lifted off the airstrip, then turned over a wooded area. Flames came out of the engine compartment as Com-Intra was hit. Thompson went in for the crew and asked Lopes to return to assist, if necessary. The Thai crew ran from the helicopter, which was burning, and boarded Hotel 89. Spelios does not recall if others boarded at that time. Lopes was told that he was not needed, but his copilot (Bob Huntsberger) had taken a round through the buttocks while he was overhead. The L-19 flew between Lopes and the enemy, drawing fire. All the helicopters had taken battle damage. Hotel 89 was hit by only one round, near the carburetor. Spelios later was interrogated by the Customer about the exact location and circumstances of the incident as a CIA officer [Mark

John Peterson
John need first name?
Peterson] had been killed on Com-Intra's helicopter. Spellios left Air America in January 1973.

Mike Ingham, Jan. 7, 1993: "Given my bias against the USAF, I am certainly not surprised that the USAF choppers retired from the field and left the AAM choppers to do the work. This frequently happened when we tried to use the AF. The magnitude of that becomes more obvious if you look at the much more powerful aircraft that the Air Force used and the fact that I am sure that they had A1-E support (they never went anywhere without them) and that the AAM guys did not."

Soutchay Vongsavanh, RLG Military Operations: Soutchay planned a last big effort to seize Paksong and Saravane and hold them until a cease-fire was negotiated. His plans called for airlanding two GMs near Saravane and one near Lao Ngam (halfway between Paksong and Khong Sedone. Although the NVA captured Khong Sedone in October, he decided to go ahead with the plan, using a reserve GM against Khong Sedone. GM 42 airdropped near the Saravane airstrip, near what turned out to be the training area for the NVA 39th Infantry Regiment. Half the GM landed and secured the airstrip but all the USAF helicopters were hit and unable to continue the airlift. Air America carried the remaining half of the GM to the airstrip. However, the loss of helicopters prevented the landing of GM 41 the following day, as planned. Instead, GM 42 moved north and secured a safer landing area for GM 41, which was inserted after a delay of several days. By the time the two GMs began the assault on Saravane, the NVA had had time to reorganize. The GMs finally captured the city. Also, the GM attacking Khong Sedone was successful. However, the NVA launched a counterattack in November. Unfortunately, the cease fire negotiations lasted six months, allowing the NVA to recapture lost ground.

October 28, 1972
Fred Frahm arrived at the airport at Savannakhet. 713 customer "Ken" [Ken Hessle] told him that earlier in the morning an NVA patrol of about a half-dozen had entered the village of Keng Kok, about 35 miles east of the airport. The were reported to be carrying "strange looking weapons." Frahm flew into the area and picked up a group of missionaries. The NVA had captured four Canadian missionaries. A Lao army unit attacked the village around noon, and the NVA patrol escaped eastwards with their captives. Ken later informed Frahm that the "strange weapons" were suspected of being SA-7s. "This is the first I'd heard about the SA-7 in Laos." Frahm to WML, 1 Aug 92.

October 29, 1972
Reuben W. Boyette, ARR MIII, ETR:

Boyette was ARR MIII from 21 May 72 until 25 Oct 72. When he first arrived, AOC and Ravens were working at LS-272 during the day and staying in VTE as night. T-28s were stationed at and flying their sorties from VTE. Following a "devastating flood" at LS-272, all operations moved to VTE. Two weeks later, the decision was made to move the T-28 and AOC operation to LS-20A, with the Ravens continuing to RGN at VTE and AOC personnel remaining overnight at 20A. "The operation is still working this way." Plans are to move Ravens back to 20A.

"The Raven FAC program has been heavily drawn down in the past four months. I consider the FAC's a valuable asset to the entire program in Laos and advise that they be continued. They work directly with the RLAF FAC's and I consider this work very valuable. The RLAF FAC program come a long way and they are a definite asset. The pilots are truly professional and are the 'CREAM OF THE CROP.' I believe the R.O.E. should be changed to allow them to work American air. The only difficulty might be a language problem. I don't believe so as most of the RLAF FAC's speak excellent English."

November 1972

Castle: General John W. Vogt, commander of 7th Air Force, visited Laos. He ordered 7/13 AF to develop an F-111 bombing program for northern Laos as communists had been able to resupply and maneuver during night and periods of bad weather. By mid-November, four AN/PPN-118 ground beacons were in place (weighed 20 pounds and could easily be transported and setup by indigenous soldiers). At first, Godley was not in favor, fearing that it would reduce his requests for B-52 strikes. However, combined with daylight attacks by F-4s and B-52s, the F-111s broke up attack on Long Tieng before it could be launched.

[Two F-111 squadrons from the 474th TFW at Nellis AFB deployed to Takhli in September 1972. They flew over 3,000 missions in Laos and North Vietnam prior to the ceasefire in January 1973.]

JHM: Information from Clyde Howard, Air Commando who was in charge of beacon project. Earlier attempts to use beacon with F-111s had been withdrawn because of technical problems. Also, Motorola beacons had been equipped with batteries that had been too heavy to haul around in the mountains; and there had been no way to recharge them. This time, there was an beacon that was easier to maintain. Howard trained experienced Hmong FAOs as beacon operators; F-111 pilots at Takhli training in use of beacons. First beacon installed atop Skyline on October 29, providing unobstructed signal. Two more beacons installed on
November 10, and operational testing began. Tests were so successful, that Beacon Site 2 near Long Tieng became operational on November 19. Beacon Site 3 at Bouam Long established on November 20, and Site 4 at Ban Na on November 21. Howard flew in Cricket/Alley Cat to monitor FAGs. "The F-111 off-set beacon bombing was effective. After some initial difficulties, air crews and ground beacon operators teamed up for spectacular results."

Also, there were experiments with PAVE MACE, laser guided bombs.

Mike Ingham, Jan. 7, 1993: "I wonder if the beacon was one that I tested. I spent about three nights on CW pad atop Skyline with a USAF colonel from 7th AF staff in Saigon testing a beacon with the F-111s as they flew up from Thailand. We had a UHF radio and he vectored them around off of the beacon. My memory is that we were there because the USAF had lost a couple of F-111s to unknown causes while on their way to NVN on missions and this colonel was testing the navigation gear of the planes. Maybe not. As we had a lot of time to talk, I found out that he had been the pilot of Air Force One. He also was having severe moral qualms about what we were doing and could not understand why I was they when I did not have to be."

Joseph M. Glasgow, Jan. 28, 1993: "Rules of Engagement forbid USAF delivery of ordnance in support of our forces if that aircraft was not under direct RAVEN control or under control of a FAG trained and certified by the Air Force at Udorn. And, the target had to be visually acquired by the Raven or the FAG. Obviously this caused a lot of lost air support. I can recall we in M21 would have 50 fast mover sorties fragged during a one day period. (Remember, fast movers and Ravens did not fly support missions at night in M21.) If the Raven or the FAG did not have a visually acquired target, the fast mover was passed off to the Nail and the ordnance was dropped wherever. We seldom got the promised loads. Yet we knew the NVA was positioned in sites around the PDJ and at other strategic locations. If we couldn't see them, we couldn't bomb them. When we got the F-111, we seriously impaired the 317th NVA Division. That bird, using the offset beacon and the experience and competence of our inhouse photo interpreters and intell collection capabilities could fly day or night, rain or shine, and they really had an impact on the morale and mental attitudes of those NVA soldiers arrayed against Long Tieng. I know General Hughes was disappointed because we couldn't or wouldn't given his body count or bomb damage results. His pilots and the AIRA in VTE, Buz Curry, convinced him that a bunch of ex-enlisted men and now civilians did not know how to use TAC AIR. Far better to
bomb where we knew the enemy were generally than to waster the ordnance somewhere out there where the buffalo roam."

Glasgow, February 16, 1993: Vang Pao wrote to the commander of the F-111 group and told him how much he appreciated his help and professionalism "and told him we learned the NVA around Long Tieng called the F-111 'Whispering Death' because they couldn't hear the plane and the bombs fell night or day, bad weather or good. (Usually, no bombs fell on the enemy at night - B-52s excepted - or during heavy weather when the Ravens couldn't see the enemy.)"

November 3, 1972
UH-34 H15 reached 15,000 hours.

November 7, 1972
Telephone interview with Michael Jarina, April 13, 1991:

Jarina went down for a Raven [John L. Carroll] who had crashed on the southern end of the PDJ on 7 November 1972 when he began to take ground fire from four Pathet Lao soldiers on a nearby ridge. The helicopter was hit several times and fuel began pouring out of the gas tank. When his low fuel warning light came on, Jarira left the area. He was able to cover a short distance to an empty STOL strip between the enemy and the friendlies, where he was picked up by French Smith. Ted Cash recovered the Raven's body under cover of "White Horse" helicopter gunships and A-1s [Not recovered - see Casterlin]. "The pilot had evidently been executed by the PL with whom we were exchanging gunfire and had just fled the scene as we approached.

Telephone interview with Tod W. Yourgli, May 1, 1991

They were on a routine mission when they heard the MAYDAY from the Raven. As they approached the area, they began to receive ground fire. Although he could not see anyone, Yourgli returned fire with his M-16. As the helicopter circled, someone on the radio said: "The pilot is dead." About this time, Yourgli saw 4-5 people coming down the ridgeline and heading for the downed O-1. He was changing his clip so was not able to fire on them. As this was taking place, Jarina said that he was losing fuel pressure and had to leave. The helicopter never landed near the downed FAC aircraft.

Telephone interview with Harry R. Casterlin, May 25, 1991:

Casterlin was in the area during this SAR, flying a S-58T with Stan Thompson, a new copilot, in the left seat.
The Raven had been spotted spreadeagled under the wing of his aircraft and obviously dead. After the USAF White Horse helicopters refused to go down and confirm the Raven's death, due to heavy fire, Ted Cash (who was hovering overhead) dove toward the ground. Although his helicopter became fogged up inside, he called out over the radio that his pilot was dead, then quickly departed the area. Casterlin felt that the SAR had been a pretty screwed up affair.

Ingham, Jan. 7, 1993: "Ted Cash was one of the best pilots in terms of his courage. He was one of those you could always go with the tough ones and be able to count on at least it getting a fair consideration for the mission."

Colonel Hayden C. Curry, Air Attache, VIE, to James A. Cunningham, Jr., VP, Laos, Air America, 13 November 1972: "Air America has established a tradition of heroism and bravery in helicopter operations, especially in the recovery of downed crew members." Two recent missions "typical of the devotion and selfless dedication of your pilots." SAR of November 7 "was so courageously supported by your company, that it has warranted the respect of all my personnel." Six helicopters involved. He singles out the crews of N8535F [Jarinja, G. Taylor, and T. W. Yourgich] and N8512F [Cash, R. A. Heibel, G. R. Neufeld] for special praise. They performed heroically and with complete disregard for their personal safety in an attempt to save a downed airman." [Air America Log, vol. VII, no. 2, 1973, p. 8]

JHM: Info from FAC Darrel Whitcomb. Carroll had recently arrived in Laos at chief Raven. He had been a test pilot at Edwards. Carroll radioed that he had been hit and was going to land on the PDJ. He came down OK and came up on his survival radio to say that he was alright. Steve Neal was the Raven on the scene. The first rescue helicopter was driven off by enemy fire. Neal brought in fighters so that a second helicopter could get in. He discovered, however, that Carroll had been killed. Whitcomb: "The bad guys had apparently shot him repeatedly at point blank range; his body was literally in pieces."

November 12, 13, 14, and 16, 1972
French Smith flies missions using infra-red glasses

November 23, 1972
John M. Bannerman, Charles J. McCarthy, Suthl Chimpaibul, and B. Somchai killed in C-7A 61-2401. Aircraft departed Pakse for DZ near Saravane. Hit by 37mm
November 23, 1972

"Aircraft Accident/Incident Report, C-7A, 61-2401," CIA Corporate Files, Box 61, UTD

PIC Bannerman, F/O McCarthy, AFDs, disappeared while on a paradrop to L-44 (Saravane). They were on a scheduled flight from Pakse to a forward DZ and presumed hit by ground fire. Aircraft had 4000 pounds of cargo, mixed fresh produce and ammunition, on eight pallets. They were 3.1 km LW of L-44. On December 6, 13 days before this incident, a C-123K was hit by ground fire in the same general area and the crew bailed out. The crew "denounced the briefing from the Pakse customer as poor and misleading." No definite cause for this loss but enemy fire is a "reasonable conclusion" with customer preplanning a contributing factor.

F/O Glenn G. Riley to C7A Captains, November 25, 1972: With the passing of Bannerman and McCarthy, the time has come for pilots in the Caribou program to take "a good hard look at our work and the conditions that prevail." The customer sees us as "flying a safe, big bird which is invulnerable." The recent tragedy shows that "the Caribou can have its troubles." Riley has just completed three consecutive tours in Pakse with Bill Leinbach. They came back from DZs on several occasions with holes in the aircraft. Leinbach has informed the customer that the Caribou needs the same support as helicopters in dangerous areas – rescue bird, Raven, air cover, etc. With the Caribou method of delivery, the aircraft is "far more exposed than the choppers." Riley says that the time has come "to unite behind some guidelines." FEPA should become involved.
antiaircraft fire during drop. [Completing worse year of AAM casualties in Laos]

November 1972
Fred Frahm to WML, 1 Aug 92:
In late 1972 there was a long-term battle taking place between Lao army and NVA on "the abstract mosaic forming the plain of paddy fields and forests east of Pakse." Also, there was an engagement being fought all across the Bolovens Plateau, southeast of Pakse. Lao army had been slowed pushed off the plateau and down a sloping road that links it with Pakse. Army was making a successful last ditch stand twenty kilometers from Pakse in effort to save town. Air America was providing helicopters to shift fresh troops into battle and carry out the dead and wounded; Caribou and C-123 were making low-level airdrops of ammunition and supplies. Air America lost one helicopter and one Caribou during this period.

"It seemed the NVA were getting the upper hand at the time and it was decided that a rather large infusion of troops was needed to keep them at bay and out of Pakse. An airlift was organized that was, and remains, unprecedented in my four-year memory of military operations in Laos. The USAF undertook the lift with Jolly Green Giants (CH-53s) from their base at Nakon Phanom, Thailand. This was the first and last time I ever saw or heard of US military helicopters involved in a joint operation with the Lao forces in the country. There were times when a US Army Skycrane made day-trips out of Udorn and was used to shift very heavy loads of artillery shells in and out of Long Tieng - and there were five Army pilots flying around the PDJ under the code name "White Horse" in Thai Hueys with Thai copilots. But this Jolly lift was unique as far as I can recall." [Ingham: There were not 5 army pilots flying the Whitehorse choppers. All the pilots were Thai and they had one US Army advisor who flew with them.]

During the lift, one of CH-53s made a hard landing and had to be left behind. The following day, Customer Grey Fox [Butler] briefed AAM crews about recovery of helicopter.
"The troops insertion had been made at an abandoned grass airstrip next to a small river, and the NVA were in full control of the area across the river. There was a dirt road that ran through the scrub forest perpendicular to the strip where we were to land four H-34s loaded with Lao soldiers. They would recon the strip, check the aircraft for booby-traps, and then form a security guard for the maintenance crew that would then go in to repair, then fly away with the Jolly. I can't recall all the names of those who formed our crews but I do remember that Jerry McEntee was the senior pilot leading the flight and Bart Jealous and I had the number two slot. We planned to go in one at a time, landing
and departing in the direction leading away from the strip. There was an Air Force FAC and two propeller driven A-1Es Skyraiders providing cover for us.

We left Pakse with five helicopters - four full of troops, and one for SAR - and met the Air Force near the LZ as arranged. With the A-1s making slow circles around us, Jerry made the first landing. As soon as he touched down the troops were out the door, running for cover in the trees. As he was lifting out of the zone, I was on short final to land. The other two helicopters made landings in the same way and were in and out quickly without a hitch. As we all joined up at 2000 feet we were quietly congratulating ourselves for the swift precision with which we'd been able to accomplish the job. And while Jerry and the FAC were going through the professional courtesies of thanking each other for their assistance, I was admiring the way the A-1s looked.

There were flying tight, lazy, right-hand circles around us, always 180 degrees to one another, so as one passed my 3 o'clock I would lean forward and look across Bart sitting in the left seat and pick up the other one coming up at 9 o'clock. With those big props pulling them along, their wings laden with bombs, and their wingtips leaving thin trails of swirling cloud in the humid air, they smoothly cut through the clear blue sky. Their power and potency was very apparent and equally impressive.

Suddenly, as I watched the A-1 pass from 9 to 10 o'clock it completely disappeared in a rolling ball of smoke and flame. As I stared in stunned silence I noted there wasn't a part of the aircraft that was large enough for me to see fall to earth. It was as though the pilot and his plane had been vaporized in the heat of the explosion - and although I didn't see it from my position in the cockpit, I'm quite sure it was an SA-7 that caused the transformation. With that thought I considered how easily any one of us could have been the target for that deadly missile."

[MGEN Alton D. Slay, ETR. Slay was chief of staff for operations in 7th AF from August 1971 to August 1972. "In summary, we were unprepared for the advent of the SA-7. That is just a flat statement. We did not anticipate it and were not prepared. We didn't have the tactics to cope with it and had to devise them on the spot. Gunship effectiveness was greatly diminished; rescue operations with the required slow movers were very hazardous if not unfeasible; in close support, if we had to get in real close in a tight situation, we either had to get down low to get the required accuracy, accepting the increased hazard, or keep higher delivery parameters with consequent reduced effectiveness.

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McShane: McShane checked out in Caribou in 1971. He made a number of trips from Long Tieng to Ban Na (LS-15), during which he was shot at every time. He also did a lot of flying out of Pakse to a drop zone near Saravane. The enemy used to lob mortar shells at the aircraft; Bannerman may have been hit by one of these. The situation with the customer at Pakse ("The Grey Fox") [James E. Butler] was not too good. He would ask pilots to do thing they should not have been asked to do and would provide incomplete and misleading intelligence.

Mauldin: The Grey Fox lied to pilots (this was unusual). An Air America FIC man was sent down to Pakse to do the briefing as the pilots so distrusted the Grey Fox.

Joseph M. Glasgow to WML, 28 Jan 1993: "I worked with Jim Butler at Pakse and never recall him lying to pilots. In fact Jim and I collaborated with several pilots in a project to help slow down the NVA 9th Regiment on the Bolovens. PS 26, on the eastern edge of the plateau, was a particular problem. Pakse SGU units and even the vaunted Hmong SGU, with USAF and T-28 support, could not dislodge the NVA from the hilltop. Napalm was used and when troops started up the slopes they met heavy ground fire. It appeared the NVA were dug-in just below the topographical crest in spider holes and Napalm burned too fast. We asked AAM C-123 and Caribou and Otter pilots to drop contaminated fuel and had fast movers hit the spilled oil with Napalm. No fire. We finally designed special incendiary grenades and secured them (one on each side of a 55 gallon drum) with strong tape with static lines attached to the safety pins in the grenades. The drums were secured to pallets, three to each pallet, and placed on rollers in the delivery aircraft. One pilot's name comes to mind, Crazy George, and he made a run on PS 26, pulling up sharply and out went the drums. The static lines were cut to insure the grenades would activate a split second after the drums hit and ground and ruptured. The split second allowed the fuel (enhanced with dry napalm or plain soap flakes) to seep over the rim and down into the spider holes before lighting. This tactic was used effectively in MR IV until it was decided there was too much risk to the aircraft and the crew and was discontinued. Several pilots were happy to drop something other than rice and ammo."

December 4, 1972
C-123K, T.R. Frazer, plane hit by small arms fire while approaching DZ near Saravane.

December 6, 1972
C-123K, W.G. Hansen, W. C. Crothers, and two Thai AFDs, 3 kms south of LS449 (Toong Set). Hit by 12.7 fire
December 6, 1972

“Aircraft Accident/Incident Report, C-123K, 54-648.” CIA Corporate Files, Box 61, UTD

Incident was near Pakse (LS-180). PIC Hansen, F/O Crowthers, and AFDS tasked to make drop in forward area from Pakse. Customer briefing said some small arms fire in the area. The aircraft was hit by 12.7mm AAA. Hansen ordered the load jettisoned, then the crew to bail out and the rudder cable snapped. Hansen managed to run through the cabin and exit through the right rear door.
approaching DZ. Jetisoned load. Crew bailed out when rudder control lost.

December 10, 1972

UH-34, H-59, B. Com-intra, Pakse area, 1345L, 11 passengers; aircraft hit by ground fire at 2000 feet. 2 passengers wounded. Damage to tail rotor shaft and rear of fuselage. "Aircraft received battle damage at 2000 feet AGL in vicinity of drop zone at XB 375830. The mission was aborted and the aircraft was flown to L11 without further incident." XOXO

December 13, 1972

Harold F. Miller, "To Whom It May Concern," in Miller Papers, UTD:

Miller arrived Pakse for flight duty on December 7, just after the C-123 had been shot down. The customer at L-11 [James Butler?] "still had requirements into and out of the area." There were 37mm antiaircraft positions to the east, southeast, and west of Pakse. After being briefed by the customer, Miller consulted with departing flight crews. "They felt the situation was bad enough to warrant the missions to be accepted on a voluntary basis per trip per individual." Miller talked to the crew members arriving with him and agreed "that we would continue on the same basis." "The situation was bad enough and the attitude was that anyone declining a trip was no less a man nor would any of us hold it against him." The numerous AAA had forced helicopters to approach and land from the north, "starting a powered dive from five miles out to attain the maximum airspeed the aircraft would fly at and to be low level the last two miles." The same procedure was used on departures. The problem was that the helicopters were carrying maximum loads in order to cut down on the number of trips, making the H-34 slow on climb and leaving the aircraft vulnerable. Miller told the customer that the northern route had been used for more than a week and that the enemy likely would be moving guns into this area. Ground forces would have to take action to keep the route open if they wanted support. "This seemed unimportant as the reply was that we would have to find another route if this happened."

On the afternoon of December 9, Miller was departing with H-70 when he began to take fire from a 12.7mm gun. He attempted to direct a Raven and T-28s but the weather was bad. The helicopters went into the area again the next day, moving the route further to the east. In the afternoon of December 10, H-59 took heavy fire, was hit several times, and experienced a fire in the cabin. Upon his return to Pakse, "we decided that we would not use that route against due to the inactivity of the ground forces and the heavy gunfire." Customer suggested that we try to get in from south, pointing out that LOH had flown in from that route.
Miller spoke to LOH pilot who said that he had flown in at altitudes above 7000 feet. He then went to the AOC and talked to Raven pilots. "They assured us that there was no safe way in or out." There were two enemy battalions in the area, including one AAA battalion.

When Capt Frahm and F/O Ruck arrived to replace crew of H-87, we explained situation. "Capt. Frahm told me that he did not feel that we wanted to fly these type missions as they were not normal and in the interests of safety could not justify accepting such a flight. I explained that those of us flying were doing so on an individual basis, voluntary only and that it was his decision. I also explained that because we were flying that he should not feel that he had to accept. The helicopter is not an effective piece of equipment in the face of anti-aircraft guns. The H-34 must be considered obsolete for any operations other than normal type flying and certainly not acceptable for this type operation." Flying low, the H-34 was vulnerable to small arms and 12.7mm fire. In the event of engine failure, it would be impossible to perform an effective autorotation. "It has been proven that at these high airspeeds and low altitudes the chances are nil to execute a safe autorotation."

"I feel that Capt. Frahm acted in good faith and with good judgment with regards to safety of flight by not volunteering to fly these type missions. To quote the S.E.A. Operators manual "A pilot shall operate the aircraft in a safe and conservative manner.""

December 15, 1972
PENCO Ops mgr John W. Kearns III [CIA case officer] fatally wounded by hostile artillery fire while supervising resupply mission to RLG forces near Pakson.

December 22, 1972
UH-34, C.R. Carpenter hit by hostile fire during medevac near LS 180 (New Pakson); damage to fuselage and main transmission.

[Bowers: AAM acquires eight CH-47Cs late in 1972]

Jerry Connor to Dan Williams: Taipei "is finished."
Regional office in Bangkok, with direct link to Washington. "Hard to tell what peace will mean for the company. I think pilot group will see a cut but can't be sure... Customer folks not overjoyed with pilots, in particular the R/W heros. God some of them are bad, and these of course are the ones who ruin it for the rest who are doing a fine job."
"Things about the same up here in Happy Valley - would like to get out but there is not damn place for me to go."
"As you know we lost too many F/W these past 24 months; a lot of the kickers talking about quitting. Cliff White quit, Knop,
and about 6 others plan to leave (including Gene Hasenfuss). Hated to see Cliff leave. "Some of the old timers are back both up country and down south. Hog and Bag talking about buying a sail boat & drinking beer for about a year - that would be a dandy."

Jess Hagerman to WML, August 28, 1991: Beginning in late 1972 and continuing into 1973, the situation in southern Laos took a turn for the worse. Until this point, aircraft fire had been light. Now, there was not only heavy fire but also Stella SA-7 hand-held missiles. (Henthorn was one of the first pilots to have a missile fired at him.) The helicopters began to carry smoke bombs. If the characteristic white cork screw smoke pattern was spotted, the flight mechanic was to toss out one of these smoke bombs. The crews also were issued parachutes, although no one explained how a helicopter pilot was supposed to bail out.

[Frahm to WML, 1 Aug 92: The story that Frahm heard was that Henthorn had gone to investigate the downing of a C-123 near Thakek [Hansen?] Reaching the crash site, he suddenly turned the helicopter on its side for a better view. "Don was known to be rather abrupt with the controls." A SA-7 went spiraling past the bottom of his aircraft, which was nearly vertical to the ground. "He then beat a hasty retreat from the area."

The situation in the south got to the point where a number of people would refuse to fly there. The crew scheduler at Udorn (Maurice) expressed his gratitude that Hagerman was willing to take the assignment. As a result, Hagerman ended up at the end going south nearly every week. He figured that it was better to go down on a regular basis and keep in close touch with the situation than to down there only from time to time and take a chance of being surprised.

[Telephone interview with Maurice M. Kestler, March 20, 1993: Kestler left Air America in August 1965 and went with Continental. He was chief pilot in Saigon for a time, then station manager at Udorn. One of the most interesting operations was the "platform flights" from Udorn, which began late in 1972. This involved a Thai-piloted C-47 that flew over the PDJ and the area north to Bien Bien Phu, carrying Lao and Vietnamese who scanned frequencies and tape-recorded messages. The tapes were taken to AB-1 where they were decoded overnight, giving operational intelligence for the next day. This operation lasted into the first part of 1974.]