

#### BACKGROUND:

January 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1968 the Americal Division was conducting Operation Wheeler-Wallowa in the Que Son Valley area, by the border of Quang Tin and Quang Nam Provinces in I Corp., Vietnam (approx. 25 miles S.W. of Da Nang).

Elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade with Division Artillery and Aviation were attached and working out of LZs Leslie and Ross.

The area was occupied by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Peoples Army Viet Nam Division (NVA), which was reinforced by four more independent PAVN-NVA Battalions.

Both LZ Leslie and Ross came under heavy rocket, mortar and ground attack. I remember flying into one of the LZs around 12 noon and hearing what sounded like bugles. I looked up to the side of the mountain and saw a North Vietnamese 'Human Wave' attack heading for the LZ. We flew in and out around the clock. At night the tracers and explosions lit up the area. In the morning light, the burning hulls of tanks and armored personnel carriers lined the perimeter.

#### 228<sup>th</sup> AVIATION BATTALION:

The 228<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion was the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division's Chinook helicopter battalion. The battalion had 48 CH-47A Chinook (Hook) Helicopters and Hq. Company had a Huey and an observation helicopter. As heavy lift helicopters, our main mission was artillery support plus moving troops and anything else needed.

'A' Company 'Hook' 032 (Tail number 66-19032) was given the mission to keep the two LZs supplied with ammo and what ever else they needed.

#### JANUARY 3<sup>RD</sup>, 1968 – THE LAST FLIGHT OF 032

On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, we were flying with CWO Carl Hess - Aircraft Commander, CWO Andy Dulay – Pilot. The ships permanent crew consisted of Wes Wierda - Flight Engineer, Nic Manzanalez - Crew Chief and Jim Duffy - Gunner.

We had brought another load of ammo into the LZs and had landed to pick up two Infantrymen and bodies to be brought back to Da Nang. There we would off load and pick up another load of ammo.

The flight plan called for us to fly down out of the Jungle Mountains of Que Son with two gun ships flying cover. As we flew low level towards the coast, we took a large amount of automatic weapons fire, hitting both the cockpit and the aft end of the ship. The hooks dual hydraulic systems were shot out resulting in total loss of flight controls.

Within seconds the ship began to pitch and roll. It did a 180/270 degree spin and began doing a loop. We hit the ground in a large fireball and the ship was destroyed.

### A VERY SKETCHY MEMORY

The last thing I remember was being pitched over and backwards then the lights went out. When I came to I was buried in the wreckage. There was smoke and some of our ammo was cooking-off in the resulting fire. I knew I had to get out but I was in extreme pain from the solar plexus down and couldn't move my legs. I didn't see anybody else in the ship. I pushed as much wreckage off me as possible and began to pull myself towards what I thought was light. I thought I saw a person surrounded by a very bright light. The person extended a hand, but I waved him off, wanting him to get out. He turned and disappeared. None of the other crew remembers this happening. I think I pulled myself through a hole in the ship and tried to free a machine gun. I couldn't get it free without falling back into the ship. Then somebody came over, grabbed me and dragged me to a small mound of dirt where the rest of the crew was.

Many years later I found out it was my Pilot, Andy Dulay.

Some of the NVA that shot us down were assaulting our position but the gun ships rolled in and took them out.

I was able to see smoke rising from the wreckage and smell the bodies burning.

A Huey came in and took Nic the Crew Chief and myself to an LZ where we were given Morphine. After that we were Medivaced to Chu Lai and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Surgical Hospital. Since the hospital was overflowing with wounded I was sent back to my company after three days, even though I couldn't walk.

Very soon after the crash a "Blue Team" from the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav's 1/9<sup>th</sup> Infantry was sent out to secure the wreckage. Internationally famous War Photographer Ms. Catherine LeRoy was with them. She took a dozen pictures, one of which was published in the Look Magazine April 1968 issue.

After three weeks of lying on a canvas cot, drinking all the beer I could get and popping lots of pills from Doc our company medic, I could very slowly walk down to the flight line. I got a new 'Hook' and went back to flying missions again – but with much pain.

When Look Magazine went out of business they donated their collection to the Library of Congress. I obtained copies of the 032 pictures for myself and the rest of the crew.

We have tried to put the pieces of the crash back together. Since I was unconscious for a period of time, and many years have passed it is hard to line up all the memories 100%.

One thing is certain; the crash of 032 has left many scars both physical and mental on all.