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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 DPW-01 IO-12 PM-09 NSC-10 SS-15 RSC-01

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### **Historical Background to loss of aircraft 66-16185 (Huey UH-1H)**

Operation Lam Son 719 was a limited-objective offensive campaign conducted in southeastern portion of the Kingdom of Laos by the armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) between 8 February and 25 March 1971, during the Vietnam War. The United States provided logistical, aerial, and artillery support to the operation, but its ground forces were prohibited by law from entering Laotian territory. The objective of the campaign was the disruption of a possible future offensive by the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), whose logistical system within Laos was known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail (the Truong Son Road to North Vietnam).

By launching such a spoiling attack against PAVN's long-established logistical system, the American and South Vietnamese high commands hoped to resolve several pressing issues. A quick victory in Laos would bolster the morale and confidence of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), which was already high in the wake of the successful Cambodian Campaign of 1970. It would also serve as proof positive that South Vietnamese forces could defend their nation in the face of the continuing withdrawal of U.S. ground combat forces from the theatre (known as Vietnamization). The operation would be, therefore, a test of that policy and ARVN's capability to operate effectively by itself.

Because of the South Vietnamese need for security which precluded thorough planning, and poor execution, Operation Lam Son 719 collapsed when faced by the determined resistance. The campaign was a disaster for the ARVN, decimating some of its best units and destroying the confidence that had been built up over the previous three years.

Between 1959 and 1970, the Ho Chi Minh Trail had become the key logistical artery for PAVN and the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF or commonly, Viet Cong), in their effort to conduct military operations to topple the U.S.-supported government of South Vietnam and create a unified nation. Running from the southwestern corner of North Vietnam through southeastern Laos and into the western portions of South Vietnam, the trail system had been the target of continuous U.S. aerial interdiction efforts that had begun in 1966. Only small-scale covert operations in support of the air campaigns had, however, been conducted on the ground inside Laos to halt the flow of men and supplies on the trail.

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Since 1966, over 630,000 men, 100,000 tons of foodstuffs, 400,000 weapons, and 50,000 tons of ammunition had traveled through the maze of gravel and dirt roads, paths, and river transportation systems that crisscrossed southeastern Laos and which linked up with a similar logistical system in neighboring Cambodia known as the Sihanouk Trail. However, following the overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in 1970, the pro-American Lon Nol regime had denied the use of the port of Sihanoukville to communist shipping. Strategically, this was an enormous blow to the North Vietnamese effort, since 70 percent of all military supplies that supported its effort in the far south had moved through the port. A further blow to the logistical system in Cambodia had come in the spring and summer of 1970, when U.S. and ARVN forces had crossed the border and attacked PAVN/NLF Base Areas during the Cambodian Campaign.

With the partial destruction of the North Vietnamese logistical system in Cambodia, the U.S. headquarters in Saigon determined that the time was right for a similar campaign in Laos. If such an operation were to be carried out, the U.S. command believed, it would be best to do it quickly, while American military assets were still available in South Vietnam. Such an operation would create supply shortages that would be felt by PAVN/NLF forces 12-18 months later, as the last U.S. troops were leaving South Vietnam and thereby give the U.S. and its ally a respite from a possible communist offensive in the Northern provinces for one year, possibly even two.

There were increasing signs of heavy communist logistical activity in southeastern Laos, activity which heralded just such a North Vietnamese offensive. Communist offensives usually took place near the conclusion of the Laotian dry season (from October through March) and, for PAVN logistical forces, the push to move supplies through the system came during the height of the season. One U.S. intelligence report estimated that 90 percent of PAVN materiel coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail was being funneled into the three northernmost provinces of South Vietnam, indicating forward stockpiling in preparation for offensive action. This build-up was alarming to both Washington and the American command, and prompted the perceived necessity for a spoiling attack to derail future communist objectives.

For the North Vietnamese, the Route 9 - Southern Laos Victory, was viewed as a complete success. The military expansion of the Ho Chi

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Minh Trail to the west which had begun in 1970 at the expense of

Laotian forces, was quickly accelerated. Laotian troops were soon withdrawing toward the Mekong River and a logistical artery 60 miles in width was soon expanded to 90 miles. Another result of the operation was a firm decision by the Politburo to launch a major conventional invasion of South Vietnam in early 1972, paving the way for the Nguyen Huê Offensive, known in the west as the Easter Offensive.

During Lam Son 719, the U. S. planners had believed that any North Vietnamese forces that opposed the incursion would be caught in the open and decimated by the application of American aerial might, either in the form of tactical airstrikes or air-mobility, which would provide ARVN troops with superior battlefield maneuvering capability. Firepower, as it turned out, was decisive, but "it went in favour of the enemy... Airpower played an important, but not decisive role, in that it prevented a defeat from becoming a disaster that might have been so complete as to encourage the North Vietnamese army to keep moving right into Quang Tri Province."

The number of helicopters destroyed or damaged during the operation shocked the proponents of U. S. Army aviation and prompted a reevaluation of basic airmobile doctrine. The 101st Airborne Division alone, for example, had 84 of its aircraft destroyed and another 430 damaged. Combined U. S./ARVN helicopter losses totaled 168 destroyed and 618 damaged. During Lam Son 719 American helicopters had flown more than 160,000 sorties and 19 U. S. Army aviators had been killed, 59 were wounded, and 11 were missing at its conclusion. South Vietnamese helicopters had flown an additional 5,500 missions. U. S. Air Force tactical aircraft had flown more than 8,000 sorties during the incursion and had dropped 20,000 tons of bombs and napalm. B-52 bombers had flown another 1,358 sorties and dropped 32,000 tons of ordnance. Seven U. S. fixed-wing aircraft were shot down over southern Laos: six from the Air Force (two dead/two missing) and one from the Navy (one aviator killed).[

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### Details of loss

A helicopter assault on Tchepone was successful, with the abandoned village seized on March 6. Two weeks of hard combat were necessary for the ARVN task force to fight its way back to Vietnam. Towards the end of the removal, a helicopter from Company B, 101st Aviation Battalion, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) was lost.

The aircraft commander, Major Barker, distinguished himself while piloting an observation helicopter during extraction operations of South Vietnamese troops on LZ Brown, Laos (situated between FSB Lola in the W and FSB Delta 1 in the E). As his aircraft approached the pickup zone, the enemy unleashed a barrage of automatic weapons fire upon his helicopter, forcing the attempt to be aborted. On the second approach, the enemy flak was so intense that the rescue effort was again aborted. Sustaining severe battle damage to his aircraft, Major Barker flew his crippled airship back to Khe Sanh. Realizing that the wounded personnel needed immediate evacuation, Major Barker mounted another helicopter (#185) and again departed to the besieged pickup zone.

Major Jack L. Barker, in a Huey UH-1H, tail number 66-16185, again attempted to land to extract ARVN troops about 20 miles west of Khe Sanh at LZ BROWN. During this attempt, the aircraft came under enemy fire (including a report of the aircraft being hit with an RPG) and was seen to spin, explode, and catch fire, then to break up in the air. No signs of survivors were seen. Because of the presence of enemy forces in the area, no subsequent search could be made for survivors.

Four men of B Company, 101st Aviation Battalion, are presumed to have died in the crash:

- o ID No 252545785 MAJ Jack Lamar Barker, pilot
- o ID No John Francis Dugan CPT John Francis Dugan, co-pilot
- o ID No 409847948 SGT William E. Dillender, crew chief
- o ID No 558686469 PFC John J. Chubb, gunner

Note: See enclosed file photographs of crew.

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The helicopter is believed to have come down in rugged/hilly terrain south of Route 9 approximately 12 miles E from Tchepone and SW of the crossroads of Routes 9 (running E-W) and 92 (running roughly N-S). Given the catastrophic nature of the aircraft failure (including the report of fire) the chances of the aircraft being recovered intact is greatly diminished as is the potential for the discovery of substantial human remains or equipment.

Note: See attached map and aerial photo reference shots in briefing pack

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### **Taskings and timings**

Mission is to investigate the areas assigned to ascertain whether the remains of 66-16185 and its crew members are in those areas and if discovered to commence the forensic investigation of the crash site(s) and retrieve any human remains for repatriation to CONUS for potential identification and further processing.

The mission is scheduled for 1 day.

Depart 0700 Local 19071974 from helipad

Scheduled return 1900 hrs Local 19071974. Return location dependent upon survey results

Breakfast will be served from 0530 Local 19071974 in the mess hall

On pad - 0630 19071974 Local

Planning and preparation activities - end of briefing - 2000 hrs Local 18071974

Element commander brief-backs - 2030 hrs Local 18071974 in HQ building main conference room

Radio Frequencies and SOI issued 2130 Local 18071974. Comm centre.

Aviation assets from 70 Aviation Detachment, 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade - briefing to follow for deploying element commanders at 1730 Local 18071974 in HQ building main conference room

JCRC will deploy 2 3-man survey teams to carry out initial reconnaissance and area surveillance.

Interpreter(s) will RV at the pad.

Liaison officers will be met on the ground.

### **Survey Element A**

Element A is to cover area bounded by grids XD515352. Primary area is the northern slopes of the feature.

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### **Element A Composition**

- SSG Bishop - Element Commander
- SSG Lloyd
- SGT Kildine
- SGT Child

### **Survey Element B**

Element B is to cover area bounded by grids XD615353. Primary area is the plateau of the spur feature and the area to the south.

### **Element B Composition**

- CAPT Hall - Element Commander
- CPO Perrin - EOD
- SGT De Garston

### **Terrain**

High ground, spur, to the south of the Pone river. Rising from the valley floor to over 1000 feet. Mixed vegetation. LZ SOPHIA EAST approximately 2 miles to the N. Route 9 runs approximately 5 miles to the N, with Route 92 running 3 miles to the E.

### **Uniform and equipment**

- All element members to wear clearly identifiable non-combatant JGs ensuring that coverage of the high visibility panels is kept to a minimum
- High Visibility armbands to be worn if troops are in possession of them
- Head gear - boonies or ball caps - to be worn (add high visibility strip if desired)
- Individual equipment for deploying element members is to include -
  - Marker panel - high visibility
  - RT- 10 radio and spare battery
  - Pistol belt (with 2 x M56 ammo case)
  - Minimum 2 x 1 quart canteen and canteen cover
  - STABO harness (with snap links)
  - Work gloves (minimum 1 pair)
  - M4 Goggles
  - Individual first aid kit

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- 10 feet length 550 cord
- Whistle
- Penknife / demo knife
- Bolero, machete or utility knife
- Entrenching tool (rigid or folding)
- Compass and maps
- Chisograph pencil
- Length of mine tape to mark areas of interest or danger
- Notebook and pencil
- Water purification tablets
- Sleeping equipment
- Poncho
- Rations and water for 3 days
- Rucksack

**NO WEAPON OR ORDNANCE E. G. FRAGMENTATION, WP, CS OR THERMITE IS TO BE CARRIED**

**Each deploying survey element is to carry -**

- 4 x body bags
- 4 x deceased effects bags
- Number of evidence bags
- Evidence recording forms
- 35mm camera and spare film
- 2 x Large shovel
- 1 x Axe
- 1 x large sledgehammer
- 1 x Chainsaw and spare gas
- Pliers
- Screwdriver set
- 2 x PRC-25/77 with spares as per SOP and spare batteries
- 1 x 10m antenna
- 200 feet mine tape (white or orange)
- Pickets/pegs
- 2 x M18 Smoke Violet
- 2 x M18 Smoke Yellow
- 2 x M18 Smoke Red
- 4 x M-118 1.25lb C4 and detonation assemblies (to clear obstacles) - to be carried by deployed survey element commander only