

**Commemoration of the Battle of Long Khanh including
Operation Overlord
7th June 2021**

**Veterans Reading
(Robert Prideaux, 6 Platoon, B Company 3RAR 1971)**

On this day, 50 years ago, Five Platoon, B Company, encountered an NVA bunker system. Four Platoon and Six Platoon, then linked up with Five, to form a Company defensive position. The fire fight lasted all day, and is now known as, the 'Battle of Long Khanh'. During that battle, an Australian Helicopter was shot down. Colonel Scott has asked me, to share with you, my personal recollections of that incident.

Five Platoon, were running low on ammunition, and taking casualties. The initial ammunition resupply had not gone well. The M60 links breaking up during the drop, leaving Four platoon the difficult task of refitting the belts before passing them forward to Five platoons' gunners. When the second Resupply helicopter was requested. Six platoon were informed that it would also attempt to casevac the wounded.

My section was then tasked with clearing a winch-point on the south-east side of the perimeter. As the lads cleared the undergrowth, I prepared Private Allan 'mitch' Mitchell, (who had been shot through the neck) to be winched out. I watched the helicopter, slowly come in over Company Head Quarters and hover, at tree top height, just north of the Drop Zone. I could clearly see the Pilot as he looked for me to give him the 'thumbs up'. Suddenly a long burst of 12.7mm Heavy Machine Gun fire struck the Helicopter on its 'port' side, hitting the engine, the left hand door gunner and the right hand pilot. The Huey shuddered and turned. Straight towards us.

The Helicopter slammed into a tall tree on the South side of the clearing. The rotor-blades sheared off, as it slid down the trunk, crashing heavily to the ground. I waited for the inevitable explosion, but the Huey remained upright and fairly intact. Despite the incoming enemy tracer rounds, those nearby, immediately leapt up and ran forward to help the injured.



I moved 'Mitch' back to a safe spot, then also ran to the crash site. By now the Lads had extricated the Right Hand Door Gunner (Cpl Peter Vidler). Others were helping remove the body of the R/H Pilot. (Flt Lt Everitt 'Lofty' Lance) (*Photo left*), and the Infantry load master, (Sgt 'Jimmy' Griffiths) who was being carried clear of the wreck.

But a crate of smoke grenades had fallen out, and one had 'popped'. Fuel was drizzling into the box, and flames were licking up the drip, towards the engine. I tried to extinguish it, but it was too late. The fire had taken hold.

It was then that I realized that no-one had gone to the far side of the Helicopter to assist the crew, so I ducked under the tail of the Huey and ran around to the left-hand side. The gunners' seat was vacant and smoke from the grenade was billowing under the Helicopter and around my boots.

The Co-pilot, (Pilot Officer Forbes) was standing on the ground looking dazed. He was struggling with his harness so I helped him, and then swiftly led him to the 'safe' side of the wreck.

The injured were being taken into the centre, near Company Head Quarters, to be treated so I grabbed the Co-pilot and headed in that direction. I put my arm around his shoulders and indicated he should keep low and crawl the rest of the way as the enemy anti-aircraft fire was now coming in, at about head height.

On returning to my position, I found 'Mitch' was being looked after by the Medics, and members of 4 platoon and 6 Platoon were removing as much ammunition from the crashed helicopter as possible, even though it was burning fairly fiercely by now.

I checked in with my section and got them to evacuate the area of the crash as the remaining ammunition was popping from the heat, and exploding dangerously.

It was at this point, that it was reported to me, that they could only account for 'four' personnel off the helicopter, and one of those was Infantry. A couple of us went out to the far side of the crash site, to search for the missing crew member, Cpl David Dubber). As we passed the searing hot and still exploding remains of the Huey, I saw the "door gunners" boots sticking out from underneath the molten wreck. There was nothing we could do.



Cpl David John Dubber MID (*Door Gunner & Missing crew member*)

WE ARE HERE TODAY TO HONOUR THE SERVICE AND SACRIFICE OF ALL WHO
TOOK PART IN OPERATION OVERLORD AND REMEMBER THOSE WHO LOST
THEIR LIVES.

LEST WE FORGET.