

Baby-Bomb?

By [James R. "Tony Tiger" Spletstoser](#)

What follows is an edited version of a Copyright 1997 article written by James R. "Tony Tiger" Spletstoser that was posted on the D/3/5th Cav Website; This article is part of his unpublished book, "Hit's Through the Chin Bubble." He was a civilian employed by Dynalectron Corp. who had a contract to collect Battle Damage Data for Aberdeen Proving Ground. He was trained as a fixed wing pilot, an aircraft mechanic, and photographer for service in Vietnam.

I met with WO R.T. Derosier to record information concerning three Battle Damage Surveys that he had either witnessed or had intimate knowledge of. WO Derosier had been flying Wheeler's wing.

At approximately 1800H, WO C.J. Wheeler was flying Lead and WO R.T. Derosier was flying his Trail. The AO was at grid VR962147, west of Kin Long in the U-Minh Forrest. The terrain was covered in tall elephant grass in about a foot of water. The Air Cav team had been called out on a contact mission. We had troops on the ground in heavy contact and the team would be their air support. The team went in and started working some Nippa rows and they took heavy fire. They pulled off and let the Cobras roll in with rockets and mini-gun. The Scouts went back into the area and basically the same thing happened. The LOHs moved out again to let the Cobras have the target. But this time the Scouts moved off to the north over some taller elephant grass and were holding there just flying around, more or less waiting for the Cobras to finish.

While the Scouts were holding, Lead spotted some bad guys and started to work on them. What had happened was that this was the main bunch. The VC had left a few of their troops back to hold off our grunts while the main body was making their get-away into the tall grass. And Wheeler had found them.

Both Scouts began working on this main group with their mini-guns along with the crew chiefs firing their M-60s. They make their runs, break, and then let the Cobras have at it. For some reason the VC weren't shooting at the team at first. While the Cobras made their run, the Scouts moved off to another place to hold and, be damned, if they didn't find some more VC. It was the same story again; they got some kills, let the Cobras come in while the Cobras worked the second area. It seemed like every place that they would pick to hold would be right over a bunch of mad VC. There were 30 or 40 of them in each group. Charlie had a major operation going here and they were not panicking; they were facing the mini-guns and rockets and fought back.

While the Cobras were doing this last batch, the LOHs returned to the first area and started working on a bunker. Charlie was waiting. The automatic weapon fire was as intense as before. The Scout Lead called the Cobras back to this target and it got hit good again. This time the Scouts went back in and it was the same-o-same-o. The Scout Lead called the Cobras back to the target again.

This time the Scouts went in taking heavy fire again. Lead made a good grenade/bombing run on the bunker. Greeno had dropped a Baby-Bomb right on the top of the bunker. WO

Derosier was flying Trail and covering the Lead as he and his observer shot up anything that appeared threatening, and everything looked threatening.

As Wheeler was breaking around he called on the radio, "My Observer is hit." Then he said, "He's hit real bad." Then a couple seconds after that, the whole aircraft went up in a big ball of fire. One instant it was a perfect OH-6A, then boom, nothing!

WO Derosier had been flying right behind the Lead and said that he couldn't understand the explosion; he had felt the heat but no concussion. He was thinking that if it had been the Baby Bombs, that 20 pounds of C-4 would have caused a shock wave that he would have felt.

The loss of Wheeler had a deep traumatic effect on Derosier. This incident in which Derosier was witness to his friend's death and later being on the Honor Guard escort to accompany the body home, were what led him to feel that the time had come for him to quit flying Scouts. He was Short, his tour of duty was almost over, so he asked for a transfer into the maintenance section of his Troop as the maintenance test pilot.

Post Mortem of the Baby-Bomb incident Statement: The words of WO Derosier are that all indications from the bodies were that the explosion happened on the crew chief's side. When we picked him up, he was lying approximately 30 feet in front and to the left of the pilot. We looked at the pilot's Chicken-Plate; it looked like it had some frag hits up on the top left-hand side. These could have been secondary projectiles driven by the explosion. The pilot still had parts of the aircraft strapped to him. He had the Chicken-Plate, seat, seat belts on and the bulkhead from behind his seat wrapped around his body. When Derosier's crew chief went over to pick up the pilot, he had to bend the metal off first. Comments from Tony: Derosier said that he had his eyes on the Lead aircraft at all times.

One second there was a perfect LOH flying along, the next, a ball of fire and black smoke. He didn't even see any of the pieces fall to the ground. He said that he would have seen an RPG if one had been fired.

For some reason he felt that it wasn't the Baby-Bombs, due to the lack of a concussion or shock wave. This is strange. To have had an explosion that took a OH-6A so completely apart, that there were not enough pieces left to investigate, there had to have been some kind of a shock wave.

If there was, it didn't register on WO Derosier and he was there. In fact, I have an actual photo of the explosion. This came about by accident. An Army photographer friend of mine happened to be riding in the Team's UH-1H C&C aircraft. When SP5 Wilson heard Wheeler's call, "My Observer's hit!", he swung his Pentax that had a 135 tele-mounted, framed the LOH and tripped the shutter the same instant that the aircraft dissolved into a ball of fire and smoke. It was pure luck, but not the kind of luck that we would have wished.