

CAT EYES AT 3000 FEET: A HOOK TINS

BY: [CLIFFORD J. MORLEY](#)

**B/228TH ASHB MAY/1968 TO MAY/1969 1ST CAV
C/228TH ASHB JAN/1970 TO SEP/1970 1ST CAV**

I was born under “The Guns Of August” 1914 and like my father before me I came of age in time for war. A lifetime passed away and dark visions began to emerge but they were just reminders that I had unfinished business to attend to. The World War II War Stories my father told to me were well chronicled, so I began to write down my own Vietnam War Stories for telling to the next generations so they would know that ONE UPON A TIME IN AN ANCIENT ASIAN LAND THERE WAS A WAR. I quickly found out they do not start out like fairy tales and are called TINS, i.e. THIS IS NO SHIT!....and that it is.

Many Vietnam War Stories are filled with blood and guts, horror and hell, death and destruction. Many are routine, if there ever was such a thing in “THE NAM”. Some are comical, some are x-rated but most are somewhere in the middle. They are all worthy of the telling and they are all worthy of being heard for they are the bits and pieces, the fragments that form the MOSAIC OF THE VIETNAM WAR...The whole story...THE BIG PICTURE. This is one of my fragments titled CAT EYES AT 3000 FEET: A HOOK TINS.

There was nothing more intense, more thrilling, more dangerous than riding the ramp at the rear of a giant CH-47B Chinook Helicopter flying low level, thunder rumbling over the jungle tree tops at 150 knots. Out the back its huge twin rotors generate a hurricane-rippling-wake-effect trailing behind us, and forward inside, the gunners stand at high alert ready to blast away at the slightest hint of trouble. In the cockpit the pilots are intently focused on flying the aircraft rapidly forward, on over rice paddies and villages teeming with Vietnamese pheasants and a smattering of water buffalo. A few shake their fists at us for flying so low and scaring the crap out of them. Like an “Iron Butterfly” out of hell we rocket on over more jungle tree tops, banking slightly right then to the left dodging obstacles in our flight path, up ten feet and then back down again. The Aircraft Commander came on the intercom and said: We’re going up! Are we clear? Three voices respond from the back: Clear at the rear! Clear left! Clear on the right! He beeped up the engines, pulled more pitch and we soared upward, shot almost straight up and in a matter of seconds leveled off at 3000 feet.

Tactical and weather considerations aside, 3000 feet was the preferred altitude for many helicopter pilots in Vietnam. It was high enough to be out of range of enemy small arms fire yet close enough to the ground to get down there intact should serious trouble develop with the aircraft. On 24 July 1970 in Binh Duong Province, South Vietnam the day was hot and clear, the winds light and variable and thunderstorms were expected later in the afternoon. It was so hot the heat oozed out of the ground in markedly visible waves creating a mirage-like effect everywhere. The sky was so clear and void of clouds the ceiling appeared navigable all the way to the stars. This infernal-surreal setting was abruptly shattered by the familiar sound of rotor blades sharply slapping air accompanied by the reverberating thunder-rumble clamor of powerful engines and

rotors working in tandem.

Sure enough! Up at 3000 feet a lone Hook was dead-heading at 150 knots in a southeasterly direction toward Saigon from Phuoc Vinh but that's not where she was going. Emblazoned on both sides of her blunted aft rotor pylon were big yellow 1ST CAV patches with wide-banded baby-blue circles around them. On her nose was the familiar silver and blue battalion crest featuring---- (PEGASUS) the winged horse of Greek Mythology born of POSEIDON and MEDUSA, a lethal combination. The four stars which surround PEGASUS are representative of the constellation which bears his name. The most prominent part of the crest however is the "Nom de Guerre"...WINGED WARRIORS. All the markings clearly identified this CH-47B Chinook Helicopter as belonging to Company "C" 228th Aviation Battalion ASHB 1st Air Cavalry Division based at Camp Gorvad Phuoc Vinh, South Vietnam.

Strapped to the left seat in the cockpit was the Aircraft Commander W3 L.A. Seaman, riding the right gun was the Crew Chief E4 S. Davis, the Pilot buckled in the right seat and the Left Gunner are out of focus. I am standing back by the piss-tube on the right side of the aircraft with the ramp behind me. I'm the Flight Engineer E5 C.J. Morley. The Gunners are intently gazing out into the airspace around us and at the "terra firma" 3000 feet down there. Seaman must be flying the ship since the Pilot is fiddling with the radio knobs and constantly switching frequencies which indicates he is working the radios. The constant grinding roar of a thousand moving parts was ever-present as the calamitous din tears away at all our ears. On board with us are ten D.E.R.O.S. Passengers who were 48 hours or less away from their DATE OF ESTABLISHED RETURN FROM OVERSEAS. We were on a fast flight to Bien Hoa and for them a rendezvous with that big FREEDOM BIRD. They were all spruced up, clean jungle fatigues, jungle boots polished, hair trimmed and they all noticeably smelled good. SHORT began at about 30 days prior to D.E.R.O.S. but when it became 48 hours and less over-caution was the rule of thumb. I could never have imagined that our Chinook Warbird was about to take us all into the very heart of THE TWILIGHT ZONE OF SHORT!

As I was standing there holding on to a piece of the airframe next to the APU hydraulic pump handle, looking forward to the cockpit I was overcome with an intense uncomfortable feeling. Our passengers were staring a hole through me, an appearance of sheer terror had come over all their faces and their eyes were big as saucers, i.e. CAT EYES! My entire backside suddenly felt very hot and I whirled around to see a huge ball of flame shooting in over the ramp. I got CAT EYES! What happened next took place in 30 seconds with maybe an additional 30 tossed in for good measure. What immediately came to mind was enemy ground fire but we were at 3000 feet and it would have to be heavy-duty weapons to reach us at that altitude. It was not that. Maybe the aft vertical shaft and/or the entire aft rotor system was about to fail? OH SHIT! No! It was not that either. The right engine was on fire and the flames were being sucked in over the ramp and into the interior of the ship. I could not raise the upper part of the ramp since it was not there to allow for the entire closure of the aft end of the aircraft. I immediately clicked on the intercom and yelled something like: Sir! We're on fire! We're in deep shit etc! Get us the F@#%*#&*# down! Now!

Davis and the Left Gunner quickly turned their attention to the interior of the ship and they got: CAT EYES! Seaman and his pilot would have knocked themselves out had it not been

for their flight helmets as they both turned in unison and bumped heads looking back to the rear through the cockpit companionway. They both got: CAT EYES! I cannot attest to cockpit activity but I would surmise it lit up like a CHRISTMAS TREE. Seaman and/or the Pilot would have pulled the T-handle engine fire suppression device and shut down the right engine. AC Seaman instantly dumped pitch and down we went, lickety split, so fast that I could swear I floated up off the floor of the ship by about an inch. All of us on board our mammoth Warbird Chinook came swooping out of the sky from 3000 feet with grayish white smoke trailing from her right engine into an expansive dried up rice paddy. At about the middle of it we came to an abrupt hover, nose high, tail low, and safely landed on one engine.

As soon as we touched down I was off the ramp and out the back with fire extinguisher in hand but the fire was out. Smoke drifted from the back, from the front and from the cowling vents of the engine. Meanwhile, Davis and the Left Gunner dismounted the M60D machine guns and formed somewhat of a protective circle around the aircraft with our unarmed passengers. The Pilot remained in the cockpit working the radios and Aircraft Commander Seaman joined me to check out the damage to the right engine. I pulled out the built in stand beneath the engine and pulled up the cowling. Some of the airframe right under the engine was melted and the cowling was badly blackened and burnt but to our amazement the engine appeared to have sustained very little damage. As I remember it, there was an unusual freak failure of an engine oil filter device which had enabled all of the oil to spill out providing fuel for a short-lived but spectacular blaze. There were no resources on board which would allow Davis and I to repair the engine in the field.

A dead calm, stone cold silence greeted my ears as I now began to make an appraisal of the terrain around us. Aircraft Commander Seaman and the Pilot had performed a well crafted emergency landing pretty much dead center of a very large dried up rice paddy which spread out in all directions for about 300 yards to the jungle which completely surrounded us. There was not a soul in sight and the sky was void of air traffic. Usually sudden silence in the jungle signals danger and it seems to me there was some difficulty with radio communications and that our MAYDAY calls may not have been picked up on our hasty descent from 3000 feet. Since I was not privy to the latter I cannot reliably address any possible radio communications difficulties. Additionally, two M60D machine guns, two shotguns, two 45 caliber Colt 1911 semi-automatic pistols, three 38 special popgun revolvers and a very limited supply of ammo and fifteen individuals to man them did not constitute being well armed or in a good tactical position. For the moment it appeared there was no cavalry coming since we had been on the ground for nearly an hour. Perhaps some or all of the above were factors in Aircraft Commander Seaman's decision to attempt flying out on one engine. One of our passengers whose demeanor was slightly laced with a tad of shock and disbelief said it best when he asked me: "Can that big-ass Hook really fly us all outta here on one engine?" My response: "Sure!"....."Maybe?"

Our ten passengers came back on board, buckled themselves back into their seats and rolled down their sleeves. The guns were remounted and the crew took their positions. I was at the rear of the ship to monitor the start up of the APU and the left engine and was plugged into the intercom system. Seaman looked back at me from the cockpit with a thumbs up and said: "Are we ready on the P Chief?" I came back with a thumbs up and replied: "We're ready on the "P" Sir! Let her rip!" The APU fired up OK. The number one left engine also fired up quickly

and as Seaman thrust the left engine throttle full forward the rotor blades roared to life. I would guess the left engine was beeped up to max power and probably a little beyond which was certainly reasonable given the situation we were in. I came back on board and raised the ramp. Our big ass Hook managed to lift off the ground to about 30 feet and fly slowly forward but we were flopping around like a wounded duck and the engine and rotors sounded real sick. I noticed our ten passengers were hanging on for dear life and getting a bad case of CAT EYES again. It became quickly apparent that there was not enough rotor RPM being generated to lift us off into flight. Finally Seaman set the aircraft back down on the ground and shut down. We resumed with our protective circle around the ship about thirty yards from where we had originally landed.

The blinding white-hot Sun was beginning to drift slowly to the West from its high noon position and I made it out to be about 1300 hours. WOP WOP WOP WOP WOP WOP WOP WOP WOP! Ah! A very familiar sound and we all looked up. The CAVALRY was coming! From out of the blinding Sun and from out of the West there came flying a long line of SLICKS, about eight of them. They swept into the dried up rice paddy at a slow hover of about two feet off the ground and scores of well armed GRUNTS came pouring out, then the SLICKS flew on to East and disappeared out of view. What a glorious sight it was to behold. The GRUNTS now formed a protective circle around us and our downed Chinook. There also now appeared in the sky above two COBRA GUNSHIPS keeping a watchful eye on everything below.

About twenty minutes later another distinct but different sound caused us all to look up again as one of our other HOOKS came flying in with some of our ACE MECHANICS from the MAINTENANCE PLATOON on board. They landed nearby and our ten passengers abandoned us posthaste and made a beeline for the other ship. I cannot say I blamed them one bit. The right engine was repaired and put into sufficient working order which allowed us to fly back to Phuoc Vinh for further repairs. Our other CHINOOK WARBIRO flew our ten D.E.R.O.S. PASSENGERS on to Bien Hoa where they arrived about 3 hours later than they normally would have. The eight SLICKS flew back and picked up all those GRUNTS whom we so appreciated, THE SLICKS, THE GRUNTS and THE SNAKES, for having come to our rescue and they flew off into other dangerous realms.

To my knowledge the ten passengers who were on board with us that day made their scheduled rendezvous with that big FREEDOM BIRD and arrived home safe and sound, none the less for wear and tear. I would imagine that to this day they all well remember their brief sojourn into THE TWILIGHT ZONE OF SHORT.

It seems appropriate at this juncture to bring to light two other HOOK TINS which were close-call incidents and come under the genre of ----CAT EYES AT 3000 FEET. Both close-call incidents took place on CH-47B Chinooks with "C" Company 228th ASHB 1st Air Cavalry Division in the early months of 1970, January, February or March. At the time the incidents took place we were not hauling any external loads and there were no passengers on board. Just the crew: The Aircraft Commander, The Pilot, The Crew Chief/Right Gunner, The Left Gunner and me, The Flight Engineer. We were flying at an altitude of about 3000 feet.

In (CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE SHIT IN YOUR BRITCHES KIND) we were cruising along at about 150 knots flying in a southwesterly direction at 3000 feet. It was fairly

early in the morning, about 0830 and Nui Ba Den loomed large, as usual, to the west of us about 10 miles away. Evidently a giant U.S. Air Force C-130 Hercules had just taken off from Tay Ninh West at the base of the big mountain and was climbing for altitude on a northeasterly heading right on a collision course with us. I did not know that Chinooks had air brakes and could stop on a dime and come to a hover from a 150 knot airspeed or there-a-bouts. Well! They don't and can't but we came about as close to doing that as is humanly and machinely possible. The Pilot riding the right seat in the cockpit and who was also flying the aircraft sighted the C-130 coming up at us fast at about the one o'clock position and without hesitation pulled back on the stick and beeped up the engines. We abruptly went nose high, tail low and the ship began to shake and shimmy and make sounds I never heard come from a Chinook before. The ship came to a steady hover very quickly just in time for us all to see a bigger than life C-130 Hercules banking sharply to it's right away from us out in front of the cockpit. Its four behemoth turbo prop engines were just whirring away as there was narrowly averted a melding of flesh and metal between a CH-47B Chinook Helicopter and a C-130 Hercules Fixed Wing Airplane. As the C-130 leveled back out and disappeared from sight we resumed our swift winged flight to the southwest. About 5 minutes of contemplative silence passed when The Aircraft Commander came on the intercom and said in a very commanding voice somewhere between calm and excited: "OK everybody! Let's stay alert! We just about BOUGHT THE FARM."

(VERTIGO IN THE CLOUDS AT TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH) The title of this close-call incident clearly sets the scenario. It was the mid-morning part of a long day's journey into night, flying missions in the CAV'S AO. We had just dropped off an external load at a Fire Support Base and were dead-heading at 3000 feet back to the logistics pad to pick up another one when we flew into the clouds. The Pilot who was flying the aircraft evidently did not get on his instruments and was overcome with a bad case of vertigo which is better known today as spatial disorientation. He began to engage in some extreme and unusual flight maneuvers which caused our big Chinook Warbird to be flung wildly all over the clouds. The Aircraft Commander grabbed the stick and was struggling with The Pilot for control of the aircraft. I cannot swear to what was said but was probably like: "Get on your instruments!", "Let go of the stick!", "I've got it!" with some choice four letter expletives mixed in. I do not recall if I closed my eyes and started praying but I might have? The Crew Chief and The Left Gunner were desperately clinging to their gun mounts. Thankfully, after about an eternal 30 seconds of this The Pilot relinquished the stick to The Aircraft Commander and routine flight was reestablished. It was determined to be a good idea to break for chow and a maintenance check early. A thorough inspection of the aircraft found all systems to be in good working order. I had expected to find several of the drive shaft load mounts broken, however, there were none.

In conclusion which is a misnomer because the adventures of a lifetime are a never ending story. New...old images continue to emerge from the far flung borders of my mind and memory. I quickly jot them down and give them titles lest I forget them again. Some of them are: (GUARD DUTY AND SHIT BURNING DETAIL AT LZ SHARRON), (JUDD:THE HOOK ARTIST OF B/228TH), (CHARLIE COMES CALLING FOR CHRISTMAS AT TAY NINH:B/228TH CONTINGENT 1968), (THE MYSTERIOUS MISSION OF THE HANGER QUEEN ABORTION), (BURLESQUE AT BEARCAT COURTESY OF GYPSY ROSE LEE), (OOPS! SORRY ABOUT THAT CHIEF:INCOMING AND LEFT ON THE GROUND), (APOCALYPSE THEN:CROSSED PATHS AT FIREBASE DELTA), (THE COLONEL'S

CUFFS AND A REBUFF), (SIR! DO YOU GUYS KNOW HOW TO FLY THIS BIRD:HOOK PILOTS FLYING A SLICK) (PETTY AND THE POW), (MONTAGNARD MAMAS NANNY GOATS AND A HOOK), (SIR! I DON'T THINK THE ARVNS WANT TO PLAY SOLDIER TODAY?) and last but not least (GRACE GRUNTS AND GUNS ON THE PSYCHEDELIC FLIGHT OF THE IRON BUTTERFLY). So it was and so it is! Bits and pieces, fragments from a mosaic put together a long time ago when..... ONCE UPON A TIME IN AN ANCIENT ASIAN LAND THERE WAS A WAR andTHAT WAS NO SHIT!

CREDITS, EXTRAPOLATIONS, NOTES, AND RESEARCH

There are many references on the internet to “The Guns Of August”. In paragraph one it is utilized as a metaphor for the final months of World War II beginning after the Normandy Invasion of 6 June 1944 and from August 1944 to Victory in Europe and on to Victory in Japan in August 1945.

Photographic and other research sources failed to identify the tail number of the CH-47B aircraft involved in CAT EYES AT 3000 FEET making it extremely difficult to locate any possible U.S. Army Combat Incident Reports regarding the matter. CH-47B 67-18479 was eliminated because she was down for maintenance and CH-47B 67-18471 was also eliminated per other sources. In July 1970 that leaves an estimated eleven possibilities in the C/228th ASHB Chinook inventory. Therefore, the details of the CAT EYES INCIDENT comes from primarily three factors, my recollection of the incident and that it took place in July 1970 but the specific date of 24 July 1970 comes from an Air Medal citation. There is also an extrapolation to a previous well documented incident which I refer to as..... THE JP4 INCIDENT OF 485. The major component of this being that The Aircraft Commander on THE JP4 INCIDENT of 31 May 1970 was also AC on THE CAT EYES INCIDENT of 24 July 1970. Additionally, photographic and recollective elements also place CE Crew Chief Sean Davis as possibly being involved in both.

Per courtesy of Jimmy Ketcham webmaster of the 228TH ASHB AND GUNS-A-GO-GO web site at <http://webpages.charter.net/228th/> and per courtesy of Gary B. Roush webmaster of The VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION at <http://www.vhpa.org> I reviewed the U.S. Army Combat Incident/Accident Case Number: 700531081 regarding C/228th ASHB CH-47B 67-18485. It identifies the crew members as: AC W2 L.A. Seaman,,,,, P W1 E.C. White, CE E5 A. Story and G E3 J.W. Hoffner. SP5 A. Story was in fact the FE Flight Engineer and the individual I believe to have been the Crew Chief CE S. Davis is not indicated in the report. THE JP4 INCIDENT OF 485 briefly summarized: On 31 May 1970 at about 2000 hours in pitch black darkness, bad weather and a host of other Murphy's Law Catch-22 Conundrums 485 ran out of fuel, went into autorotation and settled/crashed into the jungle in the vicinity of Nui Ba Ra. The crew escaped serious injury and the aircraft was later destroyed in place. What I remember most about this occurred later on that evening at about 2400 hours when Story, Davis and Hoffner came into the Flight Platoon Hootch all banged up, all bandaged up, all beat up and all bruised up excitedly telling us all about the wild and horrific ordeal they had all just endured.