

VIETNAM 1972



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO

A GI'S COMBAT CHRONOLOGY

COMPILED BY RICHARD K. KOLB AND KELLY VON LUNEN

For the Americans, 1972 was primarily an advisers and aviators war. It had reverted back to circa 1962. Only 1,000 of the 2,480 Army advisers were still in the thick of things. The roughly 6,000 GIs in ground combat units during the Easter Offensive were not committed to battle. However, a few infantry units remained in the field. Helicopter and Air Force gunship crews would play a pivotal role in sustaining the South Vietnamese army in the field.

JANUARY

11: 4 crewmen of the 162nd Avn. Co. are KIA when their Huey helicopter is shot down by a rocket-propelled grenade over Cau Mau in An Xuyen province.

20: 4 crewmen of D Trp., 3rd Sqdn., 5th Cav, are KIA when their Huey is hit by AAA fire over Khe Sanh and crashes along the Raoquan River.

FEBRUARY

13: *Distinguished Service Cross*—Capt. Luther Lasater, pilot of an OH-6A Scout helicopter of F Trp., 9th Cav, 1st Cav Div., is KIA while marking

ABOVE: An AC-130H Spectre gunship of the 16th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) on a training flight. **The 16th lost 40 KIA in 1972, the hardest hit U.S. unit that year.**

INSET: The 16th SOS's emblem.

Abbreviations

AHC	Assault Helicopter Company
ARA	Aerial Rocket Artillery
ARRS	Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Squadron
ASHC	Assault Support Helicopter Company
AT	Advisory Team
CAG	Combat Aviation Group
FAC	Forward Air Controller
SA-7	Shoulder-Fired Soviet Strela Heat-Seeking SAM
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SOS	Special Operations Squadron
STDAT	Strategic Technical Directorate Assistance Team
SW	Strategic Wing
TAS	Tactical Airlift Squadron
TASS	Tactical Air Support Squadron
TAW	Tactical Air Wing
TEWS	Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron
TF	Task Force
TFS	Tactical Fighter Squadron



USS Newport News

JULY

- 7:** 4 (only one infantryman) GIs of 1st Plt., A Co., 3rd Bn., 21st Inf., 196th LIB, are killed in their night defensive position by an errant 105mm artillery round ("friendly fire") fired by B Btry., 3rd Bn., 82nd FA Regt., from Hill 260.
- 9: Battle of An Loc.** 4 advisers of the Third Regional Assistance Command are KIA by a 105mm artillery round after landing for an inspection tour.
- 11: Battle of Quang Tri City.** 34 U.S. Marine helicopters from the *USS Okinawa* and *Tripoli* participate. 3 helicopters are shot down and 28 hit. 3 crewmen of Marine Helicopter Squadron 165, launched from the *USS Tripoli*, are KIA when their CH-53D is shot down by an SA-7 missile while inserting Vietnamese marines behind enemy lines. Five of six Army Cobras flying support are damaged. *Navy Cross*—Capt. Lawrence Livingston earns for leading South Vietnamese marines on the ground. *Distinguished Service Cross*—Army Capt. Fred Ledfors, while piloting a LOH, is responsible for rescuing five downed air crewmen.

AUGUST

- 6-7: Navy Cross**—2 pilots of Det. 110, Helicopter Combat Support Squadron 7, *USS Saratoga*, earn for rescuing a downed pilot even though their aircraft is repeatedly hit by enemy ground fire.
- 11: Last Field U.S. Infantry Unit in Vietnam Deactivated.** 3rd Bn., 21st Inf., Task Force Gimlet, stands down. D Company completes the last mission from Aug. 8-10, sustaining 3 WIA from booby traps. Spec. 4 James McVicar is the last grunt WIA. Fire Team Bravo, 2nd Squad, 3rd Platoon, is the last to board a helicopter and leave the field. The battalion departs Vietnam **Aug. 23.**
- 12:** 13 Americans—7 airmen of the 50th TAS and 776th TAS and 6 Navy/MACV advisers—are KIA when their C-130 transport is shot down during take-off from Soc Trang in the Mekong Delta.
- 22:** 1st Bn., 7th Cav (airmobile infantry), 1st Cav Div., Task

Chinook
CH-47

Force Garry Owen, departs Bien Hoa, Vietnam. D Company conducts its last mission near FSB Grunt around Aug. 5.

28: Air Force Cross—Capt. Steve Ritchie shoots down his 5th MiG, becoming the only Air Force "Ace" pilot of the war.

Last U.S. Field Artillery Units Depart. Not clear when in August. Btry. F, 26th FA (TF Garry Owen) at Bien Hoa and Btry. G, 29th FA (TF Gimlet) at DaNang, leave Vietnam. Btry. B, 82nd FA Regt., fired the last round for TF Gimlet on Aug. 10, yet the 29th FA is recorded as the last unit there.

SEPTEMBER

- 9: Air Force Cross**—Capt. Charles DeBellevue of the 555th TFS shoots down his fifth MiG near Hanoi, becoming the only Air Force navigator "Ace" of the war. He shoots down a sixth MiG later.

OCTOBER

- 1: USS Newport News**—20 sailors die and 36 are injured when a shell explodes in gun turret #2 during a firing mission off Vietnam. A faulty auxiliary detonating fuse caused an 8-inch projectile to explode prematurely. These fatalities amount to 69% of the Navy's total non-hostile deaths in the Vietnam Theater during 1972.
- 12: Last U.S. Combat Medic/Green Beret KIA in Firefight.** Special Forces Sgt. Fred Mick, assistant medical specialist of 3rd Plt., Det. 22, TF Madden, B Co., 2nd SF Bn., 1st SFG, is the last Green Beret KIA in Vietnam as well as the last U.S. combat medic killed there in a firefight. Tasked with training Cambodians, his convoy is ambushed with heavy small-arms fire on the Ben Hoa Highway from Long Hai. 7 allied Cambodians also are KIA.



Sgt. Fred Mick

- 31: Medal of Honor.** Navy SEAL Petty Officer Michael E. Thornton, Navy Advisory Group, during an intelligence-gathering and prisoner-snatch operation behind enemy lines near the Qua Viet River engages in a life-saving marathon rescue of his commanding officer though Thornton is severely WIA.

Petty Officer
Michael E.
Thornton

- 31: Largest Single Hostile U.S. Loss of Year.** 16 soldiers—12 of the 18th Corps Avn. Co.

and 4 of C Trp., 16th Cav—are KIA when their Chinook CH-47C helicopter is shot down by an SA-7 missile near My Tho in the Mekong Delta.

NOVEMBER

- 7: Air Force Cross**—Maj. John Carroll, a "Raven" forward air controller from the 20th TASS, 56th SOW, is shot down over the Plain of Jars in Laos. Refusing to surrender, he

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Driscoll, making them the war's first "Aces." Navy downs 16 MiGs all told in May, its largest kill month of the war. *Navy Cross*—5 pilots from the *USS Constellation*, most from Flight Squadron 96, earn the medal. The operation officially ends Oct. 23.

10: Largest U.S. Non-Hostile Helicopter Loss of War (tied with another in 1971). 5 crewmen of the 362nd ASHC and 29 men of D Co., 2nd Bn., 8th Cav, 1st Cav Div., die in an accidental Chinook helicopter crash en route from Bien Hoa to Vung Tau.

17: Battle of Kontum. 4 crewmen (1 DOW May 21) of Det. 1, 776th TAS, 374th TAW, are KIA when their C-130 Hercules crashes during take-off because of mortar rounds impacting nearby. On May 25 and 29, two OH-6s from H Trps. of the 10th and 17th Cav are shot down near Kontum, killing 4 crewmen. On June 2, *Gladiator 12*, a Huey from the 57th AHC, is shot down by .51-caliber fire near the Rockpile south of Kontum, killing 1 American. The pilot of another helicopter, from H Trp., 10th Cav, during an attempted extraction, also is KIA. Total of 10 U.S. KIA near city.

23: Navy Cross—2 pilots from the *USS Midway*, Flight Squadron 161, earn it during Operation Linebacker I.

24: 5 crewmen of the 62nd Corps Avn. Co., 11th Avn. Grp., 1st Avn. Bde., are KIA when their Chinook CH-47C helicopter is shot down by a 60mm mortar round on lift-off on their way to an ARVN radar site near Quang Tri City.

24: 4 crewmen of the 48th Avn. Co. are KIA when their Huey UH-1H helicopter is shot down by an SA-7 missile near Hue on the way to help in a search and rescue mission.

26: Distinguished Service Cross—Staff Sgt. Richard Arsenaull, MACV AT-43, deliberately blocks a B-40 rocket round with his body during an ambush in the Duc Hue District, sacrificing his own life to save those around him.

JUNE

5: 11 advisers of MACV STDAT-158 die in an accidental C-46A contract airplane (EM-2) crash en route from Ban Me Thuot to Pleiku. It crashes on approach to the airfield.

9: Last U.S. Infantrymen KIA. Sgt. Elvis Osborne and Spec. 4 Jeffrey Maurer of Ranger Team 76, H Co., 75th Ranger Regt., 1st Cav Div., are killed by an explosive device at Tan Uyen.



Sgt. Elvis Osborne

11: 5 crewmen of F Trp., 8th Cav, 11th CAG, are KIA in two related helicopter shoot-downs. An OH-6A Cayuse observation helicopter is shot down west of Hue during an ARVN insertion, killing 3. Another OH-6 searching for survivors is shot down, killing 2. *Distinguished Service Cross*—1st Lt. James McQuade, while flying the rescue mission in Thua Thien province, is hit by an SA-7 missile that disintegrates his helicopter.

18: 12 airmen of the 16th SOS are KIA when their AC-130 gunship (*Spectre II*) is shot down by an SA-7 missile over the A Shau Valley 25 miles southwest of Hue. They had been operating in Laos.

19: Medal of Honor. Air Force Capt. Steven Bennett of the 20th TASS ditches his OV-10A Bronco at sea off Quang Tri in the Gulf of Tonkin after being hit by an SA-7 missile, thus saving the life of the Marine naval gunfire spotter aboard while knowingly sacrificing his own.

28: Nixon Administration announces that no additional draftees will be sent to Vietnam unless they volunteer. Draftees will make up only 6% of total U.S. deaths in Vietnam during 1972.

28-Sep 16: Battle of Quang Tri (Second). U.S. Marine helicopters and advisers play a major part.

PHOTO COURTESY CW02 WILLIAM DOYLE



Members of D Co., 3rd Bn., 21st Inf., Task Force Gimlet, stage the final U.S. infantry stand down in Vietnam at Da Nang on Aug. 11, 1972.



Advisory Team 70 members just five hours after returning from the Battle of An Loc where they turned back a massive NVA attack.

75. A total of 4 U.S. advisers of AT-51 are KIA fighting along Highway 13. 9,023 U.S. tactical air strikes are conducted by Air Force, Navy and Marine fighter-bombers. B-52s carry out 252 missions. **AH-1G Cobra helicopter gunships and AC-130 Spectre gunships are constantly engaged.**

Presidential Unit Citation—Advisory Team 70 (about a dozen men) plays a pivotal role in turning back 36,000 NVA troops while outnumbered 5:1 amidst the war's

heaviest and most sustained artillery and tank assaults.

Presidential Unit Citation (April 5-July 7): 229th AHB, 1st Cav Div.—Det. 1, HHC; A, B & D Companies; F Trp., 9th Cav; Btry. F, 79th Aerial FA; and 362nd Avn. Co.—during an intensive volume of anti-aircraft fire sustains the besieged ARVN force against a massive NVA onslaught.

24: Tanh Canh Extraction. 7 U.S. are KIA. 4 Americans (2 crew and 2 passengers) of the 57th Avn. Co., 52nd CAB; 1 medic and 1 adviser of AT-22 are KIA when their Huey UH-1 helicopter is shot down over an island in the Dak Poko River near Dak To during an extraction of MACV Team 22 members from Tanh Canh base camp. 1 additional adviser is KIA while attempting to escape and evade from a compound bunker there. *Distinguished Service Cross*—John Paul Vann, former Army adviser but then a civilian working for the Agency for International Development, helps evacuate civilians, rescues wounded and directs air strikes. He is the only civilian to receive the DSC during or since the Vietnam War. He is killed later on June 9 when his helicopter crashes.

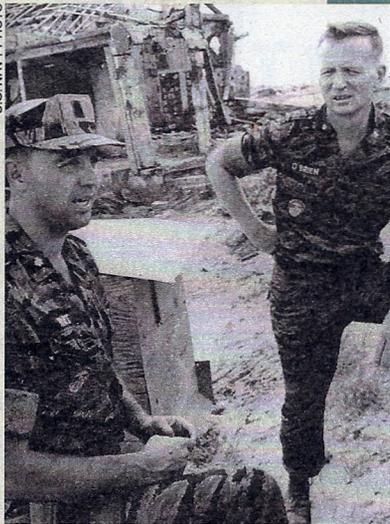
26: Battle of An Loc. 6 airmen of Det. 1, 374th TAW, are KIA

and attack the company's barracks.

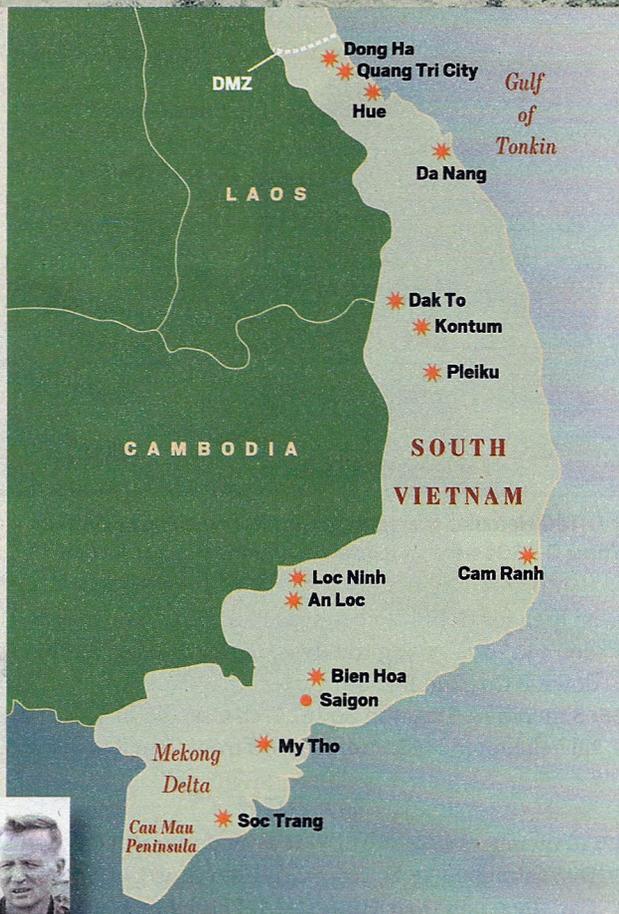
13-Jul 11: Battle of An Loc.

31 Americans are KIA: 13 of Det. 1, 374th TAW; 7 Cobra pilots of F Btry., 79th ARA; 8 advisers of AT-51 and TRAC; and 3 of the 18th SOS. *Distinguished Service Cross*—at least 6 awarded (1 posthumous). Capt. Harold Faldermeyer, an adviser of AT-51, is KIA while calling in vital air strikes during the Battle of Bench Mark

U.S. NAVY PHOTO



U.S. Marine advisers Maj. William R. Hart and Maj. Joseph J. O'Brien discuss operations during the Easter Offensive of 1972.



when their C-130 Hercules transport is shot down during an airdrop.

30: Battle of Quang Tri (First). The provincial capital city falls to a massive NVA onslaught after the ARVN fail to hold.

MAY

2: Battle of An Loc. 3 airmen are KIA when their AC-119 (*Stinger 41*) of the 18th SOS is shot down by 37mm flak. *Air Force Cross*—Capt. Terrence Courtney, aircraft commander, sacrifices his own life to save 7 other crewmembers.

2: Battle of Quang Tri (First). 5 Americans—4 crew of F Trp., 4th Cav, 1st Avn. Bde. and 1 adviser of AT-95—are KIA when their Huey UH-1H helicopter is shot down by an SA-7 missile during a rescue attempt of downed pilots near the Hai Phong Municipality 5

miles south of Quang Tri.

3: Battle of An Loc. 6 airmen of Det. 1, 374th TAW, are KIA when their C-130 Hercules transport is shot down during an airdrop.

10: Operation Linebacker I. Aircraft carrier pilots shoot down 7 MiGs; 3 by Lt. Randall Cunningham and Lt. William



U.S. NAVY PHOTO

Lt. Randall F. Cunningham, Lt. (j.g.) William P. Driscoll.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES PHOTO

A C-130 Hercules transport burns after crashing in Vietnam. Three C-130s were shot down during the siege of An Loc.



VANFLANNING.COM PHOTO

A C-130 transport crew poses moments before taking off for an airdrop over An Loc. That fierce battle cost the lives of 13 crewmen.

an area for Cobra strikes near Bien Hoa, diverting enemy fire and thus saving the lives of members of the pinned down B Co., 2nd Bn., 8th Cav.

25: 5 men of A Trp., 7th Sqdn., 17th Cav, die in an accidental helicopter crash after take-off from Cam Ranh Airfield.

MARCH

17: 10 members (5 crew) of F Trp., 1st Sqdn., 9th Cav, 1st Cav Div. (attached to H Trp., 16th Cav) plus 1 of F Trp., 4th Cav, die when their Huey UH-1H helicopter accidentally explodes in flight, crashing in the Dong Nai River east of Bien Hoa.

28: 14 members of the 16th SOS are KIA when their AC-130 gunship Spectre 13 (*Prometheus*) is shot down by an SA-2 missile over Muang Phine, Laos. It was truck hunting along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

30-31: Largest Mass Crew Rescue. Spectre 22, an AC-130 gunship of the 16th SOS, is shot down near Saravan, Laos, by 37mm and 57mm fire. Pilot Capt. Waylon O. Fulk receives the Air Force Cross for his daring actions in ensuring that the crew parachutes safely. Involved in the rescue is a vast array of aircraft and includes seven attacks by the Air Force in support.



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTOS

Lt. Col. Iceal Hambleton was shot down in an EB-66C (shown is an EB-66E). A massive rescue effort followed.

APRIL

2-16: Rescue of Bat 21. In the war's greatest single rescue effort, 13 Americans are KIA (including original crash victims). 5 airmen of the 42nd TEWS are KIA when their electronic countermeasures aircraft EB-66C (*Bat 21*) airplane is shot down by a SAM near Cam Lo. That same day, a Huey UH-1H



CONGRESSIONAL MCH SOCIETY

Lt. Thomas Norris

(*Blue Ghost 39*) helicopter from F Trp., 8th Cav, 196th LIB, is shot down near Dong Ha with 3 KIA and 1 POW. On the 6th, 5 crewmen of the 37th ARRS along with 1 of the 601st Photo Flight are KIA when their HH-53C (*Jolly Green 67*) is shot down. 800 airstrikes are launched in support of the search. Between April 10-13, SEAL adviser Lt. Thomas Norris and a Vietnamese SEAL (awarded the *Navy Cross*) perform an incredible rescue behind enemy lines of 2 downed pilots. Lt. Col. Iceal Hambleton of *Bat 21* is rescued on April 16; Lt. Mark Clark later. Norris is awarded the **Medal of Honor**.

3: 4 crewmen of the Avn. Det., HHC, 37th Sig. Bn., 1st Sig. Bde., are KIA when their Huey UH-1H helicopter is shot down by a SAM during a resupply mission flying from Marble Mountain northwest of Quang Tri City.

4-7: Battle of Loc Ninh. *Distinguished Service Cross*—5. 5 U.S. KIA, 4 POW (later released). CWO 2 Robert Horst of the 159th Med. Det. is KIA by small-arms fire on April 7 attempting to evacuate wounded from TF 52 along Highway 13. He is the

last dustoff aviator KIA in Vietnam.

Other KIA include 2 Cobra pilots from F Btry., 79th ARA (on April 5) and 2 advisers of AT-70.



Cobra gunship

U.S. ARMY PHOTO

7: An OV-10A Bronco is shot down by a missile over Dong Ha while coordinating a naval gunfire support mission. The Marine aerial observer is never heard from again. The Air Force FAC of the 20th TASS is captured on April 18 and executed (shot six times) by a local VC.

9: 4 GIs (3 are communications center specialists) of the 510th Signal Company are KIA by satchel charges and gunfire when VC sappers infiltrate Cam Ranh Bay Base

1972 Hostile Deaths by Service

SERVICE	KIA	% OF TOTAL
Army	172	57%
Air Force	70	23%
Navy	47	16%
Marine Corps	11	4%
Total	300	

single-handedly resists two enemy companies with small-arms fire until mortally wounded.

DECEMBER

18-29: Operation Linebacker II ("Christmas Bombing"). In the most concentrated air offensive of the war, U.S. aircraft drop 40,000 tons of bombs on Hanoi and Haiphong. Air Force, Navy and Marine crews fly 4,000 sorties, including 729 B-52 missions. B-52s fly from Guam and Thailand. 15 B-52s and 12 other aircraft are shot down. 37 airmen are KIA, 27 on Dec. 21 alone. Participating bomber units: 72nd SW (15 KIA), 307th SW (15 KIA) and 43rd SW (3 KIA). Tail gunner Staff Sgt. Sam Turner downs a MiG, the first of the war for an aerial gunner. On Dec. 24, tail gunner Airman 1st Class Albert Moore shoots down another MiG, the war's only other aerial gunner kill. *Air Force Cross*—2 earned by B-52 bomber pilots.

19: USS Goldsborough—NVA shore battery fire kills 3 sailors and wounds 5, causing fires and putting a 5-foot-wide hole

in an upper deck of the guided-missile destroyer.

21: 14 airmen of the 16th SOS are KIA when their AC-130 gunship Spectre 17 (Thor) is shot down by 37mm fire over Ban Laongam, Laos, while truck hunting. 1 of the 14 is a ride-along pilot from the 497th TFS.

21: Deadliest U.S. Day of 1972 = 41 KIA. 27 Americans are killed in the bombing campaign and 14 gunship crewmen are lost over Laos. Also the worst single day of the war for the Air Force.

31: U.S. troop strength 24,200 in Vietnam. 54,000 in Thailand and 60,000 in 7th Fleet offshore. **Hostile deaths:** 300. Plus 251 non-hostile deaths. 22 MACV advisers are killed on the ground—9 by "friendly fire"—plus 4 Special Forces advisers. **Gunship crews of the 16th SOS are hardest hit: 40 KIA.** **Wounded total** 1,221 (587 hospitalized). **Medals of Honor: 3;** Distinguished Service Crosses: 28 (including 18 advisers and 5 helicopter crewmen); Navy Crosses: 13; and Air Force Crosses: 21.

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U.S. NAVY PHOTO



U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO

Marine Capt. John Ripley received a Navy Cross for extraordinary heroism in destroying the Dong Ha bridge during the April 1972 North Vietnamese Easter Offensive.

Just prior to an AC-130 gunship mission is Jerry Van Engen, third from the right in the back row. Van Engen was replaced at the last moment on the night of Dec. 21, 1972, when Spectre 17 was shot down over Laos, losing 14 men.



PHOTO COURTESY JERRY VAN ENGEN