

Lam Son 719 - JAN-MARCH 1971

ARVN, into Laos from 30 Jan - 24 Mar 1971. U.S. provided all of the aviation assets for this operation. A/101 AHB "Comancheros" were one of the aviation units in this operation, along with being the sole 101st Airborne aviation unit supporting the Special Operations Group in I Corp during the month of February 1971.

The objective of Lam Son 719 was to disrupt an ongoing North Vietnamese Army supply buildup at Tchepone, Laos. American Helicopter Units supported and provided all transportation of ARVN troops/supplies into and out of Laos during this operation. The US Helicopter Crewman went against the heaviest anti-aircraft barrage incurred in the War.

The US helicopters that supported Lam Son 719 received fire from rocket propelled grenades, enemy tanks, mortars and small arms fire. The US helicopters were regularly opposed by NVA 23mm, 37mm, and 57mm anti-aircraft weapons along with .51 caliber machine guns arranged to provide mutually supporting anti-aircraft fire. The enemy opposition comprised a permanent logistical force of engineers, transportation, and anti-aircraft troops, together with elements of five divisions that included 12 North Vietnamese infantry regiments, a NVA tank regiment, an NVA artillery regiment, and 19 NVA anti-aircraft battalions.

The South Vietnamese government claimed that 13,341 NVA had been killed against 5,000 ARVN KIA/WIA. American estimates put the ARVN losses at 10,000 which amounted to half of ARVN forces committed to the operation.

The losses to US Helicopter Forces were 65 Helicopter Crewmen KIA, 818 WIA, and 42 MIA. 618 US Helicopters were damaged, including 106 totally destroyed, from 30 Jan -

"The operation was conceived in doubt and assailed by skepticism, preceded in confusion."

Dr. Henry Kissinger speaking on Operation Lam Son 719

The following excerpt from *Newsweek*, 15 March 1971, was more objective than most at the time

To the modern American cavalryman of the air, the plunge into Laos has been something like an old-time charge on horseback: admirably heroic, stunningly effective-and terribly costly. For four weeks now, American helicopter pilots have flown through some of the heaviest flak in the history of the Indochinese war. One-day alone last week, the Army admitted to losing ten aircraft to the unexpectedly heavy North Vietnamese ground fire, and there were

reports from the field that the actual losses had been much worse. As a result, the customary bravado of the American chopper pilot was beginning to wear a bit thin. "Two weeks ago," said one gunship skipper, "I couldn't have told you how much time I had left to serve in Vietnam. Now I know that I've got 66 days to go, and I'm counting every one." Another flier added anxiously: "The roles are reversed over there. In Vietnam, you have to hunt for the enemy. But in Laos, man, they hunt for you.

Despite the risks, it was inevitable that U. S. helicopters should be deeply involved in the Laotian campaign, for more than any other artifact of war, the chopper has become the indelible symbol of the Indochina conflict. Helicopter pilots were among the first Americans killed in the war a decade ago, and, under President Nixon's Vietnamization program, they will probably be among the last to leave. In the years between, the chopper's mobility and firepower have added a radically new dimension to warfare, and the daring young American pilots have scooped up their Silver Stars, Distinguished Flying Crosses and Air Medals by the bushel-along with Purple Hearts. In the opinion of many military experts, the helicopter has been the difference between a humiliating U. S. defeat in Vietnam and whatever chance remains of attaining some

"Just say it was the Comancheros"

(Cover Story, Newsweek, March 15, 1971)



round in the head, his crew chief flew the aircraft back to Khe Sahn, Feb 28, 1971. Butch was a Scout Pilot from Richlands Hills, Tx. Butch and Mac were both with C Troop, 2/17 Cavalry Squadron.

Take the links below to see this Newsweek article

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[Just say it was the Comancheros](#)

[The VHPA listing of all of the helicopter units involved in Lam Son 719](#)

[A Map of Northern I Corp and Laos with PZ's and LZ's designated.](#)

[Another Map of the Lam Son 719 AO](#)

Lieutenant Colonel Mike Sloniker (Ret) has spent thousands of hour's researching Lam Son 719 and is the foremost Historian on the subject.
Mike Sloniker writes for this web page:

From everything I have read about Lam Son 719 since July 1971, the massive buildup by the NVA using the 559th Logistics Group that was Headquartered near the Mu Gia Pass was totally not anticipated. From 08 Feb to 20 Feb, the ARVN attack was really moving along nicely when the four firebases north of Hiway 9 started getting overrun. This was Firebase 30, 31, Ranger North and Ranger South.

I am of the basic opinion that NO ONE WAS IN CHARGE during LAM SON 719 because the commands were not unified. Wysong and Turner were with the 48th at Dong Ha in a new avn bn numbered the 223d and in the chaos of trying to get organized and fight an incredible fight in Laos. Then you had the 14th CAB from Chu Lai, hanging in there pretty good but greatly limited by the performance of the Charlie Models. Then there is the 101st that had MANY units flying into Laos before LS 719 for CCN-4/77th, 101 Avn Bn and the 158th Avn Bn. So who do we put in as the lead company into LOLO on 03 Mar 71? The Comancheros of A/101 who have done CCN insertions into LOLO before LS 719? Hell no! The leadership put in the 71st AHC who absolutely got their asses shot off.

The whole thing was chaos. The ONLY reason there was ONLY 106 aircraft lost and 65 crewmen killed from 08 Feb 71 to 20 Mar 71 was because of the determination of the teenagers flying the aircraft who decided THEY were not going to let their friends down. Had NOTHING to do with getting the mission done. Had everything to do with NOT letting your buddy down.

Mike Sloniker

[AHC web site](#)

[on the 48th](#)

Lt. Colonel Sloniker has collected volumes of records, interviews, audiotapes, photographs and other information on Lam Son 719. Lt. Col. Sloniker has co-authored and/or assisted on the following books:

Charles Holley/Mike Sloniker, Primer of the Helicopter War

WT Grant, Wings of Eagles

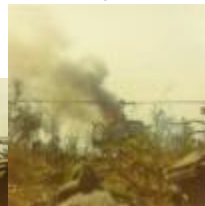
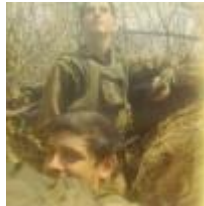
Tom Marshall, The Price of Exit and his new book he is writing on Lam Son 719

The 1994 Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association directory concerning LAM SON 719

Joe Kline in an article in "Vietnam" concerning Lam Son 719

Special thanks are given to Mike for his efforts to record history correctly, from A/101 AVN and all aviation veterans.

Photographs from LZ Lolo - March 03, 1971



Comanchero Crew on the ground on LZ Lolo

Comanchero Helicopter burning at LZ Lolo

Remembrances of LZ Lolo © By Gilbert Alvarado, CE, UH-1H 6816252

[LZ LOLO, Lam Son 719 - 03 Mar 1971](#) [LZ LOLO #2](#)

[Comanchero photographs from Lam Son 719](#)



Scans of the VHPA 1994 directory© above are property of VHPA they show the location of several downed aircraft on LZ Lolo

The following is a reprint from Vietnam Studies, AIRMOBILITY, 1961-1971, by Lieutenant General John J. Tolson -Department of the Army, Washington, DC 1973- pages 240-244

Lam Son 719 - The Battle

The attack into Laos was initiated on 8 February from bases established on the Khe Sanh Plain. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam 1st Armored Brigade Task Force crossed the border at 1000 and advanced nine kilometers to the west along Route Nine on the first day. Three battalions of the 3d Regiment, 1st Army of the Republic of Vietnam Infantry Division, air assaulted into landing zones

south of Route Nine while two battalions of the 1st Army of the Republic of Vietnam Airborne Division air assaulted north of Route Nine. Some 105-mm howitzer batteries were air-landed in both areas on D-day.

On 9 February, all air moves were canceled due to adverse weather; however, the armored task force was able to move two kilometers further to the west. On 10 February, the 1st Army of the Republic of Vietnam Airborne Division air assaulted a battalion into Objective Aloui and the armored task force linked up with this battalion at 1555. On the same day, the 1st Army of the Republic of Vietnam Division landed a battalion at landing zone DELTA and the initial objectives of LAM SON 719 had been seized.

After the attack on 8 February the enemy reacted violently to the allied offensive. He aggressively employed his weapons and troops already present in Southern Laos and he reinforced heavily his forces and committed a variety of weapons including tanks to the battle. Reinforcements came from North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and other parts of Laos.

By 19 February the Rangers in the north were receiving frequent attacks by medium artillery, sappers, and infantry and resistance was stiffening in the area of the 1st Army of the Republic of Vietnam Airborne Division. Resupply and medical evacuation became increasingly more difficult. When weather precluded the employment of tactical air, as it often did until noon, and emergency Resupply and medical evacuation was urgently required, the availability of helicopter gunships became even more critical.

By 22 February attacks against FireBases 30 and 31 and the Ranger positions were becoming more frequent and more intense. Enemy mines, ambushes, and the severe lack of maneuver room combined to slow the movement of the armor columns and they were unable to reach the Rangers to relieve the pressure. Consequently, it was decided to extract the Rangers on 25 February to a less hostile area near the Republic of Vietnam border. However, by this time, enemy supply bases one and two kilometers square had been found and major petroleum, oils, and lubricants pipeline had been found and cut by Air Cavalry gunships. Tons of ammunition and food stocks had been destroyed. Six hundred and eighty weapons had been captured.

On 25 February the enemy made a classic armor attack against FireBase 31. They had moved their armor stealthily over concealed routes to final assault positions before being discovered. Then the tanks with supporting infantry launched a violent daylight attack against the firebase. The defenders, supported by U. S. tactical air, threw back the first and second waves of the enemy attack; but, on the third wave, three Soviet-made T-34 tanks made it to the top of the Base and forced the withdrawal of the defenders. This was to be the first and last success of enemy tanks during LAM SON 719 and the only friendly firebase to be completely overrun in Laos.

Three Army of the Republic of Vietnam armored cavalry squadrons and four infantry battalions had not proved sufficient to provide ground security for the 20 kilometers of road in Laos. Consequently, General Lam had reassessed his plan of attack after the disappointing results of friendly armor in keeping open Highway Nine. Obviously he could no longer plan to use this as a secure main supply route. Capitalizing on his airmobile support, he decided to attack the main

objective of Tchepone with a series of rapid air assaults along the high escarpment to the south of the river using the 1st Infantry Division. From 3 to 6 March the 1st Army of the Republic of Vietnam Division had accomplished a series of airmobile assaults to the west along the escarpment overlooking Route Nine. The first Army of the Republic of Vietnam units' air assaulted successfully into landing zones **LOLO**, **Liz**, and FireBase **SOPHIA WEST**. After a very effective preparation of the area by B-52's, on 6 March two infantry battalions were lifted by 120 Hueys for 65 kilometers to air assault into landing zone **HOPE** north of Tchepone. *This large combat assault was carried out in what was considered to be the most hostile air defense environment ever encountered in the entire war, yet only one Huey was hit and it made a safe landing in the objective area.* The Army of the Republic of Vietnam units attacked south and west controlling the town. Tchepone was the objective of the allied drive to the west and was the natural communications hub of the enemy's logistics system in Laos. The enemy immediately increased his pressure in the Tchepone area and attacked the Army of the Republic of Vietnam firebases on the escarpment viciously.

The I Corps Commander decided that most of the objectives of **LAM SON 719** had been accomplished and ordered a timed withdrawal from Laos before weather worsened. During the extraction to the east from the Tchepone area, new enemy forces brought heavy pressure to bear on the Army of the Republic of Vietnam all along Route Nine. Extremely heavy antiaircraft fires were encountered along routes to or from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam firebases. Enemy pressure was also felt at the primary U. S. Forward Support Area at Khe Sanh, which received heavy attacks by fire and sappers. All and all, the enemy used every means at his disposal to make the allied withdrawal as difficult as possible.

The last elements of the 1st Infantry Division were extracted on 21 March and the remaining Vietnamese forces withdrew back into South Vietnam over the next few days. The major airmobile actions in Laos were terminated by 25 March even though some Army of the Republic of Vietnam forces continued to operate across the border. Two highly successful airmobile raids of battalion size were conducted between 31 March and 6 April.

Thousands of tons of ammunition, petroleum, oils, and lubricants, and other supplies and equipment were destroyed by **LAM SON 719** forces including U. S. air assets. In addition to the destruction of these stockpiles, supplies from the caches of Base area 604 were at least partially consumed by the North Vietnam Army forces opposing **LAM SON 719**. Initial reports of supplies and equipment destroyed or captured include over 4,000 individual weapons; more than 1,500 crew-served weapons; 20,000 tons of ammunition; 12,000 tons of rice; 106 tanks; 76 artillery pieces; and 405 trucks. Over 9,700 secondary explosions further indicate the effectiveness of B-52 strikes, tactical air, helicopter gunships, and artillery.

As a minimum, it can accurately be stated that the enemy lines of communication in Base Area 604 were severed, and that supplies and equipment ceased to move south through this area during the inclusive dates of the operation. This was particularly significant, for in past years the enemy has reached his peak

efficiency in moving resources south during the months of February and March. Additionally, the detailed knowledge obtained concerning the location of depots, trail networks, truck parks, and the fuel pipeline would permit more precise targeting in the future.

Enemy personnel losses were very heavy. While these losses might eventually be replaced, the requirement to replace losses in such regiments as the 1st Viet Cong, 29th, 36th, 64th, 102d, and 803d would, in all probability, draw off replacement personnel programmed for other units. Combined air-ground operations in Base Area 604 resulted in a reported total of 13,914 enemy killed in action. Air and ground attacks inside the five depot areas reportedly accounted for 5,357 of these casualties. An additional 69 enemy soldiers were captured.

On March 6, 1971 U.S. Airmobile assets launched the largest air assault of the war. 120 Huey's lifted two ARVN infantry battalions into the town of Tchepone, Laos, capturing it against light enemy resistance.

This is a reprint on Lam Son 719 from the book: 'VIETNAM THE HELICOPTER WAR' by Philip D. Chinnery 1991, Chapter 11 1971-1972: THE ROAD HOME, page 157

the 1st Armored Brigade along Highway 9 to Aloui and then on to Tehepone, where Highway 9 intersected the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Twenty-two miles inside Laos, Tehepone was a major enemy communications and supply hub. The highway was to be kept open as the main supply route. The 1st Infantry Division was to attack on a parallel axis to the main attack along the high ground south of the Xe Pon River and protect the southern flank of the Airborne Division. The Ranger Group would establish firebases north of the highway and protect the right flank. A Marine brigade would remain in reserve near Khe Sanh. The operation began as planned with the 1st Armored Brigade Task Force advancing nine kilometers along Highway 9 on the first day and with three battalions of the 1st Infantry Division air-assaulting south of the highway and two battalions of the Airborne Division assaulting to the north. The enemy reacted aggressively, rushing reinforcements to the area, including tanks. The US Army Cobras tried to halt the enemy armor and had some success sweeping the accompanying infantry from the tanks using 2.75-inch Flechette rockets, but the usual high explosive rockets had only limited success in stopping the tanks. Even when high explosive, anti-tank rockets were available. The results were mixed. In order to score a direct hit. The rocket had to be fired from a distance of 500-1,000 meters, which brought the Cobras into the range of the tanks' machine guns and the enemy infantry in the area. Between 8 February and 24 March the 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry sighted 66 tanks, mostly lightly-armored PT-76s, but only destroyed six and immobilized eight others. A dedicated tank-busting helicopter was sorely needed. Soon enemy pressure bogged down the ARVN advance and poor weather and heavy air defense opposition began to limit the air support available to relieve the pressure.

By 25 February. The invading forces had discovered enemy supply bases one and two kilometers square and had cut a major POL pipeline. However, the tide was beginning to turn and enemy infantry, supported by tanks, overran FireBase 31, capturing 120 South Vietnamese, including the battalion commander. With three enemy divisions pressuring them, the Rangers began to withdraw from their firebases. Unable to continue the advance along Highway 9, General Lam decided to use his airmobile assets to launch an air assault on Tchepone and on 6 March 120 Hueys lifted two ARVN infantry battalions into the town, capturing it against light enemy resistance.

With overall enemy pressure increasing and the weather worsening, the problem now was how to withdraw while still in contact with the enemy. It proved impossible to keep the highway open and secure, so many of the ARVN units were withdrawn by helicopter and often under fire. Panic occasionally set in and some helicopter crews resorted to greasing the skids of their Hueys to prevent ARVN troops clinging to them during the evacuation process. The last elements of the 1st Infantry Division were extracted on 21 March and the rest of the invasion force a few days later.

Although thousands of tons of ammunition, supplies and POL had been destroyed by the ARVN units and US TACAIR and B-52 strikes. The invading force had been driven out by the North Vietnamese with heavy losses. The South Vietnamese government claimed that just under 14,000 enemy had been killed against 6,000 ARVN killed and wounded. American figures however. Estimated ARVN losses at around 50 percent. With nearly 10,000 killed. Wounded or missing. United States aircrew losses were 176 killed, 1,942 wounded and 42 missing. Helicopter losses were put at 107 destroyed and 600 damaged.



ABC NEWS COMMENTARY

By Harry Reasoner 16

February 1971



- [Vietnam Helicopter History CD-ROM](#)
- [Lam Son 719 After Action Reports -18 pages](#)
- ["Into Laos" Keith Nolan](#)
- [Amazon. COM: Books: Price of Exit](#)

- [174th AHC Cockpit Audio Tapes from Lam Son 719](#)
- [Aviation News - Helicopter Crews Returned from Laos](#)
- [174th Assault Helicopter Company - 1971 - Several LS 719 references on this web site](#)
- [Lam Son 719 for the 48th AHC](#)
- [Lam Son 719 Order of Battle](#)
- [B Co, 2nd BN, Lam Son 719 \(Part 1\)](#)
- [Laos During Lam Son 719](#)
- [Operation Lam Son 719 - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)


More photos of A101 AVN and LS 719 are on our [picture page](#).



D/101 AVN "Hawk" providing support during LS 719 - Photo By Robert Carr



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