

# STAR STRIPES

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Trail in

The  
mand s.  
last wee.  
been kill  
47 crew-

captured in  
area just south of  
the DMZ. One Communist defector  
was received, they said.

The Reds rained 23 rounds of  
122mm rocket fire in to Fire  
Base Charlie 2 late Saturday, at  
the same time dropping five  
rounds into FB Carroll and 11  
rounds into FB Alpha 4.

FB Fuller was hit Sunday  
morning by 10 rounds. South  
Vietnamese said there were no  
casualties from the shellings on  
any of the well fortified fire  
bases.

In relatively slow action  
around the country:

— Infantrymen of the 22nd  
ARVN Div. fought a Communist  
platoon and killed 11 while tak-

## Sunday Briefing A War Casualty

SAIGON (UPI) — The U.S.  
military command announced  
Sunday it will stop sending a  
military spokesman to the Sai-  
gon war briefing on Sundays  
"unless we have some signifi-  
cant action to talk about."

The command said spokesmen  
would remain on duty in the  
Command Information Office to  
answer questions telephoned in  
on an individual basis.

6 Pacific Stars & Stripes  
Tuesday, August 24, 1971

## A Hair-Raising Helo Adventure

# Guys Like These Are Still Waging War

By STEWART KELLERMAN

QUANG TRI COMBAT BASE,  
Vietnam (UPI) — The tiny ob-  
servation helicopter was whirring  
along at treetop level when the  
first round thumped into its en-  
gine. Two more 51-caliber anti-  
aircraft rounds quickly followed,  
hitting in rapid succession like a  
boxer's knockout combination.

"I just didn't want to believe  
it," WO Bill Halevy said. "I  
didn't want to believe we were  
hit. I didn't want to have to go  
down there, right in the middle  
of all those Communists."

Down went the OH6 light ob-  
servation helicopter, hitting the  
rocky ground and crumbling  
into a twisted ball of plastic,  
metal and wire.

Pilot Halevy and his crew-  
members—Spec. 4 William Hillegas  
and Spec. 4 Joel Gibson—lived through three of the  
most hair-raising hours of their  
lives Friday.

It all might have ended in  
tragedy if not for the quick ac-  
tion of their platoon leader—  
Capt. Joseph M. Laster.

All the GIs involved, however,

consider this just another day's  
work for U.S. helicopter crews  
scouting the ridges and valleys  
where Vietnamese troops fight  
Communists in the area.

Halevy and his men where fly-  
ing over a ridgeline about four  
miles north of Artillery Base  
"Fuller" Friday morning,  
searching for a North Vietname-  
se battalion believed in the  
area. Their helicopter went  
down near a stream at the bot-  
tom of the ridge.

"As soon as we were hit I de-  
cided I wouldn't be captured,"  
Halevy said. "I'd have shot my-  
self instead. I'd save the last  
bullet for myself. I don't want to  
be a prisoner of war. Your family  
worryes and nobody knows  
what's going on."

After they pulled themselves  
from the wreckage of the heli-  
copter, the downed crewmen  
could hear Communist soldiers  
messaging each other by whis-  
tling in code. As the whistling  
got louder the three Americans  
began moving up the ridge in  
hopes of signaling rescue heli-  
copters.

believe this crisis has to  
be resolved. Otherwise the na-  
tion will be in great danger.  
That's why our decision cannot  
be made in haste and I must  
take time to consult with the

bout this, Ky said, "if  
speaking strictly about  
matters, there have been  
many unlawful things con-  
cerning the first posting as well  
as the second. The government  
has failed to apply the law so  
the law should not be expected  
to be applied entirely in this  
case."

"I near-crashed before and I  
expected the worst," Hillegas  
said. "Crashing was the hardest  
part for me. After that, when I  
realized I was still alive, I just  
wanted to get up that hill and  
away from the Communists as  
soon as I could."

It took them about an hour to  
climb through the thick under-  
brush on the ridgeline and reach  
the top. All the time they kept  
low, trying to avoid the Commu-  
nists searching for them.

The incessant whistling got  
louder, never letting them forget  
the danger that was there. At  
the top, they found a clearing.  
For two hours they waited and  
waved their fatigue jackets to  
get the attention of U.S. heli-  
copters searching for them.

Lester was in another OH6,  
one of a half dozen helicopters  
looking for the downed crew. As  
soon as he spotted them, he  
rushed to nearby Camp Carroll,  
dropped off his other two crew  
members and returned empty to  
pick up the three downed men.

"There was shooting all over  
the place as I came in to pick

them up," he said. "It was like  
a million guys shooting at me.  
There were rounds everywhere.  
I broke off and did a quick '360'  
(circle) and then I quickly  
dropped to the ground."

The three men piled into the  
helicopter with Gibson, the last,  
screaming "take off" while still  
standing on the skids. They fired  
with their M16 rifles and .45 cali-  
ber pistols as the chopper lifted  
off the ground.

"You don't know how good it  
felt to get out of there," Gibson  
said. "You can't imagine how  
good. The first thing we did  
when we got back was to tell our  
war story."

Lester received a Silver Star  
medal Saturday for going down  
and getting the three airmen.  
The three downed men were rec-  
ommended for Bronze Stars.

"What bugs me the most  
about it all is that people back  
home don't seem to realize there  
are guys like us still fighting  
here," Halevy said. "You read  
how about all the combat troops  
are gone and how there's nobody  
here. What are we doing? Aren't  
we anybody."