

## Chapter 20

# WIRETAP RECOVERY WITH A HATCHET PLATOON

February 1969

**J**anuary proved to be a bad month for CCC. On the 29th, every American on Recon Team New Mexico was KIA on a mission in Laos. They were S.Sgt. Charles D. Bullard, Sgt. Billy J. Simmons, and Sp5c. Larry A. Stephens.

On January 30, Sp4c. Jerrald J. Bulin was KIA on the nightly security recon patrol around the base camp at Kontum. There were NVA troops in the area at that time, and the 'Yard camp had been hit one night. Bulin had arrived at CCC only a couple of days before. That brought the total Americans lost in January to six, the highest loss count of any month of my tour. And this did not include the four crewmembers of the Huey from the 170th AHC lost on January 8 supporting CCC recon operations.



In February one of the recon teams located an enemy telephone line along a road network of the Ho Chi Minh Trail that skirted the Vietnamese border just inside northern Cambodia. They decided to plant a wiretap, a suitcase-sized device designed to record the messages sent over the tapped line and relay them to

a plane that would periodically fly overhead. After planting the wiretap, the team withdrew a few hundred meters to RON for the night.

During the night, the team had an emergency when the enemy seemed to be cutting a road right up to their position. A firefight ensued, and they were extracted the following morning. About a week later a Hatchet Platoon of approximately 35 men was to be inserted to recover the device because it had stopped transmitting. One of the Americans from the team that had planted the wiretap accompanied the platoon to assist in locating it. I was the medic assigned to accompany the platoon.

The mission was launched from the CCC compound at Kontum instead of the normal launch site at Dak To. This was because the flight to Dak To would have been longer than the distance to our target area. We were dropped off in Vietnam about a mile from the Cambodian border.

The insertion was accomplished without incident, and we proceeded west toward the Cambodian border. We traveled up and over two small, moderately steep hills and then hit an enemy trail with bunkers built on either side every 10 to 20 meters. At this time we also

