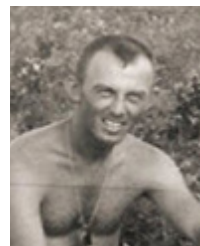


First Person Account: Operation Hastings

Tragedy at LZ Crow



Sgt Jim Bathurst
Platoon Commander
2nd Platoon

Our entry into **Operation Hastings** itself, after spending several weeks as a lone rifle company in the **Dong Ha**

and **Cam Lo** areas, was on 15 July 1966. The date will live forever in my mind.

I had never witnessed so many helos assembled in one location—an array of approximately 30 of varied assortment: the older Korean War vintage **UH-34s** and **UH-37s**, and the newer **CH-46s** and **Huey gunships (UH-1E)**. It appeared our entire battalion was going in on one lift.

Echo was first in at **LZ Crow** and we were the lead platoon. We organized into helo teams based on what we were told each type of helo would carry. However, as always, men were pulled off the end of teams as individual pilots had their own damn standards, so much for unit integrity!

My team boarded the flight leader's bird, one of the old **UH-37** models, a large single-rotor helo from the Korean War, and so worn out you could actually see the ground between the decking. Destination was **LZ Crow**.



Photo taken by a war correspondent on the ground at LZ Crow. It made the cover of Time magazine.

Our mission was to reinforce a Marine battalion already there. Good, I thought, it meant a “cold” landing zone.

The trip went as usual; however, as we began our descent into the LZ, the Marine across from me was suddenly startled by some-

thing. His eyes opened wide, and his mouth dropped as though he had just seen a ghost.

I turned, looked out the nearest window, and saw a **CH-46** helo trailing smoke heading for the ground. I heard our engines and rotors accelerate as we regained altitude. I got up and moved around looking out the windows, attempting to better observe the damaged helo. The crew chief shouted in my ear, “**A bird's been hit, and it crashed!**”

We hovered at a safe altitude for what seemed like an eternity until the crew chief informed me we were returning to **Dong Ha**.

The transit back to the base was not at all pleasant. Since I was in the lead helo, I feared it could be one of the helos carrying a squad

from our platoon. My mind conjured up all sorts of thoughts: Why didn't we land to help? Are we just going to leave without any attempt to rescue them?

We landed back at **Dong Ha** and began the ghastly task of counting heads. It seemed to take forever to determine who the hell was on that bird because of having to drop men off helo teams when loading. Long before the final determination was made, I knew it was one of my helos. I could not locate my platoon sergeant or my second squad. I was distraught, absolutely destroyed emotionally.

In one fell swoop we lost ten brothers including **Sgt Herolin T. Simmons**—a fearless, professional Marine and a great platoon ser-



“Our Platoon Sergeant” Platoon Sgt Herolin Simmons, along with 11 Marines and one Corpsman, gave their lives for their country when their helicopter was shot down on Operation Hastings



North Vietnamese anti-aircraft battery with supporting infantry

geant—as well as our entire second squad, and our Doc. Maybe, just maybe some survived. I prayed. We spent the day reorganizing

within the company. Our platoon was provided with Marines from the other platoons so we could still maintain three functional squads, and we were assigned another Doc from battalion.

Capt Larsen briefed the platoon commanders that evening that we were going to try it again the next morning. He also told us there were no survivors. The helo was believed to be hit with .50 caliber fire from far outside the LZ.

Thirteen dead in one short span of minutes—ten from our platoon! I am sure none of our Marines slept that night. I know I didn't. Such a loss for a leader is near impossible to get past, but I had

to move beyond it—if I could. I prayed for help.

— **Colonel Jim Bathurst**
USMC (ret)