

TAIPAN 609 - PILOTS ACCOUNT

by Bob Bratkovic

Another bad day at the office, this time with 609. Another miracle witnessed by Taipan 11's crew. A really lucky shot by Charlie hit the tip of a 17 pounder and two of them blew up in the pod. I thought an RPG hit us. The force knocked us nearly 90 degrees on to our left side. Yanked her back, got ready to autorotate, and I think it was Jim Gumley flying with me again, yells out "everything's green", but were obviously in very bad shape, so I put right down in the closet paddy. I think Cougar 6 was passing by and came right down to pull the medevacs. The gunner was covered with blood, but he was the only wounded. He lucked out in the end. I think he ended up with less than a dozen stitches in his face to fix a bunch of little cuts - THAT'S ALL. I think he was short time under 90, so it was his ticket back to the world.

I didn't shut it down, but my copilot and crew chief said with all the shrapnel holes in her, we looked like a piece of green Swiss cheese. There were quite a few warning lights lit, but we were only about 5 clicks from Dong Tam. CC wanted to bring in a CH-47 to take her home. My crew all agreed we'd rather limp her home ourselves than have the embarrassment of Chinook messing her up any more.

After we shut her down back at Dong Tam and starting inspecting her, it was amazing that we didn't fall out of the sky from all her injuries. I think it took over 50 skin patches, as well as a lot of total replacement parts, like blades, windows, avionics, lots of hydraulics and wiring. I could stick my fist through that hole in the main rotor blade. Had a chunk just miss my foot that came through the chin bubble. That's the gunner's helmet with a three inch piece of shrapnel pierced through it, but NOT his head. There was also a six inch piece that didn't make it through the chicken plate he was sitting on.

Think about this! One 17 pound warhead has a kill radius of like 15 meters. We had TWO blow in the pod 3 feet from the gunner's face! Why didn't they all blow? Just those TWO should have blown us out of the sky right there and then!