

Memories of the Siege of 1968 Linger in the Fog at Khesanh

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rivals had ever been to Khesanh before, and probably not many knew details of the siege in which some 300 Americans were killed and 2,200 wounded in and around Khesanh.

Infantry In First

The first Americans into Khesanh last Saturday were infantrymen. They made a helicopter assault and secured the base.

Capt. Barry Buckley of Aurora, Ill., of the Fifth Division Mechanized, was the first man on the airstrip. He said that he was not worried about the enemy but some of his men admitted that they were.

"Everybody was real tense," said a platoon leader, Lieut. Brian Bower of Albuquerque, N. M.

"We came in on 26 choppers," he continued. "Captain Buckley was the last one out. When I saw he had a big grin on his face, I knew everything was all right."

Soon they were followed by engineers of the 101st Airborne Division. "I never saw so many choppers in my life," Lieutenant Bower said.

The engineers immediately began repairing the old metal airstrip—torn and battered

by shellings and the weather—and laying a new dirt strip alongside it.

By Sunday morning the area around Khesanh was termed secure. No enemy soldiers had been seen and no shells had fallen. Casualties were put at three men wounded when they stumbled across mines.

Lieutenant Bower said that the assault force had been told that there were minefields around Khesanh and that the work to disarm them—plus scores of dud shells found in the abandoned base—had been tedious and dangerous.

It slowed construction on the new dirt strip; designed to take the four-engine C-130 cargo planes that won the gratitude of the besieged Marines in 1968. The first C-130 landed at Khesanh today and became mired in the soft clay. The engineers were trying to move it with bulldozers.

In the last few days, a 101st Airborne patrol on the perimeter stumbled into an old marine minefield and four soldiers were wounded. As one was being taken out in a sling on a medical evacuation helicopter, he fell and was killed—the first American to die since the return to Khesanh.