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**DANGEROUS WORK:** Clarence J. Romero Jr. of the Bronx by his light observation copter in Khesanh. His mission is to skim over enemy in Laos, attracting fire. He returns fire, and skips out of the way so heavier-armed Cobra gunships can move in for the kill.

## From a Bronx Copter Pilot's Diary: Laos Is Far Worse Than Cambodia

**KHESANH, South Vietnam, March 1 (AP)**—Clarence J. Romero Jr. of the Bronx, a 33-year-old warrant officer, has the most dangerous job in the air war over Laos. He pilots a tiny light observation helicopter (L.O.H.) at tree-top level, waiting to draw fire.

When the North Vietnamese gunners open up, he returns fire with grenades and a machine gun, then skips out of the way for better-armed gunships to move in for the kill. He says he has killed 33 North Vietnamese soldiers.

Today he allowed The Associated Press to see his personal account of the war. This is his diary:

**Feb. 12**—Well, this isn't the stuff I usually write on but it will do for now. Even the atmosphere has changed a lot. Today was one of the worst days I have ever spent in 'Nam. We lost two Cobras today. One went in with crew aboard. The area was real bad.

Heavy stuff all over. So far I have been lucky. I haven't taken a hit. Whether it will hold out or not only time will tell. This is two times, maybe three times worse than Cambodia. Laos is in a class all by itself. We haven't lost any L.O.H. [light observation helicopter] crews yet.

This [the Laos action] is something I wanted the U.S. to do, but they're doing it

with ARVN troops. Another thing. I don't want to leave in the middle of this operation but then again I do. I feel when I leave I won't be finishing my job, but it is only a matter of time before I get killed.

**Feb. 13**—No. 390 was shot down today but Pascoe made it back. Our first L.O.H. shot up. I am surprised at myself, especially while in the field.

**Feb. 14**—Valentine's Day. Two ships shot up bad but everyone O.K.

**Feb. 16**—Still alive so far. It is pretty bad out there. Like something I have never seen before. The weather is bad. Cold too. I am feeling well though. Dirty but all right. My morale is O.K. The flying is bad most of the time.

**Feb. 18**—Bad day. Crandall killed. I was supposed to take his mission. Flew eight hours. I worked the area right behind Crandall when he went down. I couldn't find a thing. That ship was just obliterated off the face of the earth. A weird day.

**Feb. 21**—Flew today into Laos. Took pictures. Nothing much going on. Got shot at bad, by the way. Ran into a bunch of people on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and they opened up with AK's. No hits. Lucky me.

**Feb. 23**—Flew into Laos today. Got two kills and saw a tremendous hootch. Had a lot of fun for a change.

**Feb. 24**—Nothing up. We will have some fun like in Cambodia. But Laos is different I guess. The good old days are over. No one really likes to fly out there any more.

**Feb. 25**—Not much really to write about. Supposed to look for tanks today on Hill

31. Two L.O.H.'s shot down today. They were working the area where the Phantom pilots were downed. One crew made it O.K., but the other guys were hurt bad enough to go back to the world.

**Feb. 27**—Today I told Butch I wanted to fly two or three more missions in Laos so I can take some flicks, maybe even get some tanks. Who knows? Simpson got kind of concerned about it and said no, but I told him I wouldn't get zapped.

The last time over in Laos, Pascoe hit them with CS [tear gas] and frags and Petes [smoke rockets]. I went in, and they gave me the 21-gun salute.

Just heard Nixon is going to send a few ground troops in to rescue us if we go down. It should have been done long ago with a lot more G.I.'s. The flying will get a little better I think. If I get shot down, at least there will be Americans on the ground.

The whole spirit of the war will go up because of this. At least it did when I flew in Cambodia.

**Feb. 28**—Well, today is another one of those days

where it hits you in the face about what you're doing. Butch got killed today. Only yesterday he had been trying to take me off flight status because I was getting short. It's really a drag. He was kind of messed up in some ways. But getting killed makes you realize how good he was.

It's the second scout lost since I've been out here. I just got back from looking at the ship. Blood and guts everywhere. But still Wilson flew it back.

I still want to go out there though, knowing I'm short. I must be crazy. It's been real hot lately and pilots getting killed doesn't help personalities either. The word's around about my new platoon leader. I will have to break him in. It's weird. Among the scouts, they say if you are new you will kill yourself within your first seven missions. So far, this has happened twice.

**March 1**—I just found out that I have been wounded. It's crazy. A piece of shrapnel came out of my shoulder and I didn't even know it was there. So I'm getting a Purple Heart.