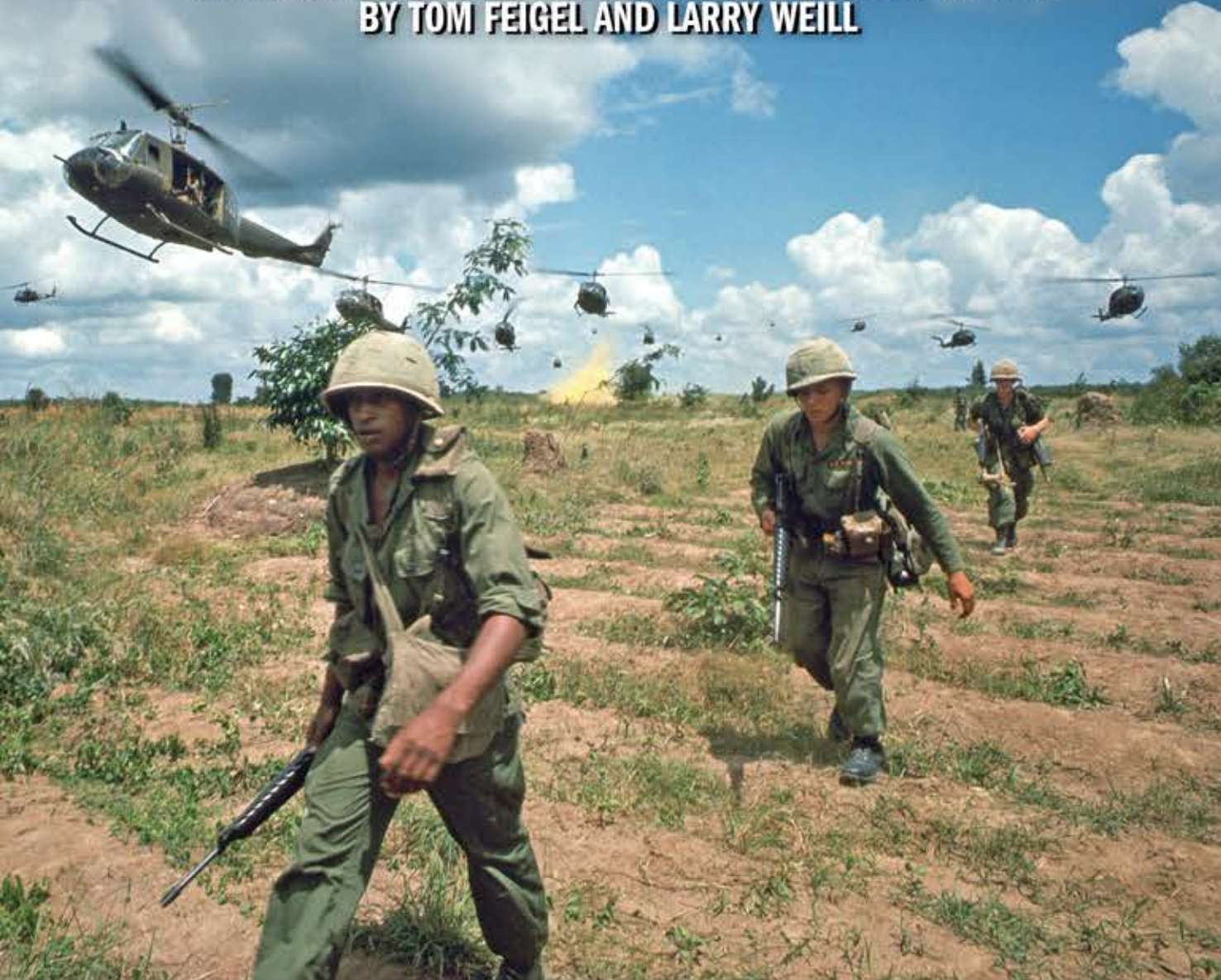


# BATTLE AT VC LAKE

RECOUNTING A FERIOUS HELICOPTER SKIRMISH DURING THE VIETNAM WAR  
BY TOM FEIGEL AND LARRY WEILL



Seemingly endless stream of Slicks bringing troops to an LZ (note that one target has been set afire in the background).

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This chapter excerpted from the book *Super Slick* covers the events involving a 12 May 1970, battle with Viet Cong (VC) fighters in the area surrounding VC Lake. It has been drawn from

the remarks and observations of three members of the 336th Assault Helicopter Company who were on the scene at different times of that day and following evening. These three individuals — a pilot and 2nd

Platoon Leader (Capt. John Leandro), a Crew Chief (the author), and a door gunner (Spec. Sady Caicedo) — were all on different ships, thus offering unique and varied accounts of the harrowing action. >>

**V**C Lake. It's a small and very shallow body of water located in the Mekong Delta, southwest of Ca Mau. I'm sure it has a more official name on the local Vietnamese maps. But to us, it was just VC Lake.

The place didn't have a good reputation. It got its nickname from the fact that it was infested with VC fighters and had been used as an ambush site for some time. It was later determined to have been used as the Headquarters of the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) 95th Regiment, although that was unknown to us at the time (the 95th was established as part of the NVA 325th Division in April 1962. Its troops completed their training in the southern panhandle of North Vietnam and in neighboring Laos before crossing the Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Vietnam in October 1964). We had operated in that vicinity in the past, and it was never fun. The place had about the same reputation as the U Minh Forest: there were lots of bad guys, so it was a free-fire zone (this meant that we shot at anyone we saw).

For us, the day of 12 May 1970, started out as most others. We were on the schedule to perform the night flight mission along with a sister ship from the 121st Assault Helicopter Company. It would be a routine night of alternating two-hour shifts: two hours of flying, then two hours on the ground. Since it was our turn to take the first shift, Sandwith and I were sitting in our revetment, making preparation for the night's activities. Everything was as usual, with nothing out of the ordinary.

That didn't last long. Everything stopped as we saw Olson running toward our ship with a copilot in tow, trying to keep pace with our Aircraft Commander (AC). That was never a good sign. If our AC was sprinting when nothing appeared wrong, then something was definitely wrong. Seriously wrong.

Sandwith and I didn't wait for instructions. Without a word, I ran to unhook the blades while our gunner quickly finished the last of his weapons preps.

"Throw some flares in the ship," yelled Olson as he launched himself through the starboard side door without seeming to take a step up. I had seldom seen him in such a rush.

I complied by throwing some extra

flares into the back as the engine was spooling up.

"We got a ship down," he called out, turning his head in my direction. So much for our routine night flight. Everything would be changing, and we'd be flying into a firefight somewhere, which was about all we knew. I wasn't even sure I'd seen this copilot before. I don't believe he'd ever flown with us on any prior missions. It was probably someone Olson had just grabbed on his way out the door. I put on my helmet and then checked with Sandwith to see if he was ready for liftoff. As I did so, I could feel my heart racing and the adrenaline starting to pump through my body. I knew that this was where we earned our pay.

"Are we ready to go?" called Olson, already set to work the controls for liftoff. "Yes, Sir," I replied.

Olson then called the tower and started pulling pitch. It all happened in a matter of minutes. As soon as we'd pulled to a hover and cleared the revetment, we turned and pointed our nose toward Ca Mau, which would be our first stop before the high-speed transit to VC Lake.

As we flew, we monitored the urgent radio transmissions from the operating area. There was a lot going on, and we could tell there was a lot more taking place than a simple rescue of a shoot-down. There appeared to be a major ground battle in progress with a lot of support ships in the air. As we picked up more bits of radio talk, we heard that there was a ship burning on the ground, although we did not yet know which ship that was. I felt my adrenaline pick up even more. So much death and destruction.

By the time we arrived at Ca Mau, it was completely dark outside. We would have to pick up a lot of ammo that had been on Leandro's ship while also taking the opportunity to top off our fuel. This was going to be a long night.



The author with his helicopter, which was named *Super Slick*.

## FLIGHT OF CAPTAIN JOHN LEANDRO

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Captain John Leandro, 2nd Platoon Commander, had been operating out of Ca Mau that same day. The ARVN troops had been operating in the area of VC Lake for a couple of days and had been meeting stiff resistance. Intel had provided reports of North Vietnamese regulars supporting the Vietcong, and the level of hostile fire seemed to back that up. They had received reports from the ARVN that their troops were in real trouble and were in dire need of ammunition.

As we headed out from Ca Mau, we were flying along with *Warrior 23*, which was piloted by Warrant Officer Steven Seeman and Chief Warrant Officer David Gallion. Also onboard were Crew Chief James Milne and door gunner Sady Caicedo. They were in the lead, while I was flying off their left wing, slightly behind them. (I always flew tail — last one in, last one out.)

The C&C ship, which was piloted by our Operations Officer, Capt. Stan Coss (call sign *Warrior 3*), gave us instructions to reach the LZ. We were to proceed straight ahead until we intercepted a canal, where we would turn and follow the canal until we could locate the area to land. At that point we were to turn 90 degrees into the LZ and set down.

*Warrior 23* accidentally overshot the turn, so I asked them to pick up my wing. Once they came back up on my left side, I turned back toward the LZ and saw C&C