

8/24/69

G.I.'s Reach

'Copter Site, *all* Find Bodies

LANDING ZONE CENTER, Vietnam (AP) — American infantrymen reached the crash site of a downed U.S. command helicopter early Sunday and reported finding six bodies in an initial search.

Eight men aboard the chopper included Lt. Col. Eli P. Howard Jr., 41, of Woodbridge, Va., and Associated Press photographer Oliver Noonan, 29, of Norwell, Mass.

AP photographer Horst Faas, who was with the troops that reached the wreckage 31 miles south of Da Nang, said Howard's body had been identified, but not the other five.

The troops continued searching for the other two bodies, believed thrown from the wreckage when the helicopter went down in flames Tuesday after being hit by North Vietnamese anti-aircraft fire.

Faas reported by radio that pieces of Noonan's camera equipment were found in the main part of the wreckage. He said most of the bodies were covered by burnt debris.

Fierce Resistance

Troops of the U.S. Americal Division's 196th Light Infantry Brigade had been moving toward the crash site since Wednesday. They had encountered fierce enemy resistance until late Saturday.

Field reports said there was no opposition Sunday morning as they pushed on to the crash site itself.

This indicated the enemy may have pulled out after the five-day battle, which ended when the Americans captured Hill 102, about 1,000 yards from the crash site.

To the south, a U.S. Army hospital at Cam Ranh Bay was attacked Saturday night for the second time this month, taking about five 82 mm. mortar rounds just before midnight. A spokesman said one round exploded in a ward, causing most of the attack's 18 wounded.

Two Americans were killed and 98 wounded when the hospital 195 miles northeast of Saigon was struck Aug. 7 by enemy sappers.

The U.S. military installation at Cam Ranh Bay, long considered one of the most secure areas in the country, was visited by former President Lyndon Johnson on two trips to South Vietnam.

The battle for Hill 102 had lasted three days. Four companies of the U.S. Americal Division occupied it at nightfall Saturday against light resistance after suffering a half dozen wounded. It was the first day since the battle began that the Americans suffered no combat deaths.