

## USAF Helicopter Crew Losses – The Southeast Asian War 1962-1975

Compiled by Jim Henthorn, Former Sgt., 21<sup>st</sup> SOS

*(This is a work in progress - please advise of any errors or inaccuracies to [jhenthorn@panhandle.rr.com](mailto:jhenthorn@panhandle.rr.com))*

*@JEH Last Update: 12/20/2007*

---

Tail No.: 62-4510    Model: HH-43    Date of Loss: 20 Sep 65    Unit: Det 1, 38<sup>th</sup> ARRS, NKP  
Country of Loss: NVN    Call Sign: Dutchy 41

Co-Pilot: Duane W. Martin (02E-91)

Notes: The helicopter was participating in the SAR for ESSEX 04, an F-105D piloted by Capt. Willis E. Forby, who was captured by the NVN, when it was hit by ground fire and crashed. Three of the crew were captured; however, Lt. Martin evaded and made his way to Laos and was captured by the Pathet Lao; at the end of June 1966, Lt. Martin, along with USN LTJG Dieter Dengler, Air America civilian Eugene DeBruin, a Chinese National, and three Thais, escaped from the Houay Het Prison camp in Central Laos. Martin and Dengler evaded together for 17 days before Lt. Martin was killed by a machete wielding villager. Dengler was rescued five days later.

---

Tail No:                    Model: HH-43                    Date of Loss: 11 Apr 66                    Unit: 38<sup>th</sup> ARRS, Bien Hoa SVN  
Country of Loss: SVN                    Call Sign:

PJ: William H. Pitsenbarger (06E-102)

Notes: On April 11th, 1966, while defending some of his wounded comrades. For his bravery and sacrifice, he was posthumously awarded the nation's second highest military decoration, the Air Force Cross. "Pits", as he was known to his friends, was nearing his 300th combat mission on that fateful day when some men of the U.S. Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Division were ambushed and pinned down in an area about 45 miles east of Saigon.

Two HH-43 "Huskie" helicopters of the USAF's 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron were rushed to the scene to lift out the wounded. Pits was a pararescueman (PJ) on one of them. Upon reaching the site of the ambush, Pits was lowered through the trees to the ground where he attended to the wounded before having them lifted to the helicopter by cable. After six wounded men had been flown to an aid station, the two USAF helicopters returned for their second loads. After lowering it's litter, the Huskie was hit by the small arms fire. When its engine "ran away" or surged to full power when a round jammed the fuel control full open, the pilot realized he had to get the Huskie under control and cut the cable to the Stokes Basket and cleared the area. Pits remained with the Army troops under enemy attack to continue the evacuation with the other helicopter.

Pits continued to treat the wounded and, when the others began running low on ammunition, he gathered ammo clips from the dead and distributed them to those still alive. About 7:30 PM that evening, Bill Pitsenbarger was killed by Viet Cong snipers.

(Continued on next page)

---

Additional Notes: AFA

By April 1966, 21-year-old A1C William H. Pitsenbarger, then in the final months of his enlistment, had seen more action than many a 30-year veteran. Young Pitsenbarger had gone through long and arduous training for duty as a pararescue medic with the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service and had completed more than 300 rescue missions in Vietnam, many of them under heavy enemy fire. He wore the Air Medal with five oak leaf clusters; recommendations for four more were pending. A few days earlier, he had ridden a chopper winch line into a minefield to save a wounded ARVN soldier.

His service with ARRS convinced Pitsenbarger that he wanted a career as a nurse. He and a close friend, Harry O'Beirne had applied to Arizona State University for admission in the fall at the suggestion of his pilot, Hal Salem. But that was months away. He had a job to do in Vietnam and, as rescue pilot Capt. Dale Potter said, Pitsenbarger "was always willing to get into the thick of the action where he could be the most help."

On April 11 at 3 p.m., a call for help came into his unit, Detachment 6, 38th ARR Squadron at Bien Hoa. Elements of the Army's 1st Infantry Division were surrounded by enemy forces near Cam My, a few miles east of Saigon, in thick jungle with the tree canopies reaching up to 150 feet. The only way to get the wounded out was with hoist-equipped helicopters. Pitsenbarger, on alert duty status, went with one of the two HH-43 Huskies scrambled on this hazardous mission.

Half an hour later, both choppers found an area where they could hover and lower a winch line to the surrounded troops. Pitsenbarger went down the line, administered emergency treatment to the most seriously wounded, and explained how to use the Stokes litter that would hoist casualties up to the chopper.

It was standard procedure for a pararescue medic to stay down only long enough to organize the rescue effort. Pitsenbarger decided, on his own, to remain with the wounded. In the next hour and a half, the HH-43s came in five times, evacuating nine wounded soldiers. On the sixth attempt, Pitsenbarger's Huskie was hit hard, forced to cut the hoist line, and pull out for an emergency landing at the nearest strip. Intense enemy fire and friendly artillery called in by the Army made it impossible for the second chopper to return.

Heavy automatic weapons and mortar fire was coming in on the Army defenders from all sides while Pitsenbarger continued to care for the wounded. In case one of the Huskies made it in again, he tried to climb a tree to recover the Stokes litter that his pilot had jettisoned but was unable to shake it loose. When the C Company commander, the unit Pitsenbarger was with, decided to move to another area, Pitsenbarger cut saplings to make stretchers for the wounded. As they started to move out, the company was attacked and overrun by a large enemy formation.

By this time, the few Army troops able to return fire were running out of ammunition. Pitsenbarger gave his pistol to a soldier who was unable to hold a rifle. With complete disregard for his own safety, he scrambled around the defended area, collecting rifles and ammunition from the dead and distributing them to the men still able to fight.

It had been about two hours since the HH-43s were driven off. Pitsenbarger had done all he could to treat the wounded, prepare for a retreat to safer ground, and rearm his Army comrades. He then gathered several magazines of ammunition, lay down beside wounded Army Sgt. Fred Navarro, one of the C Company survivors who later described Pitsenbarger's heroic actions, and began firing at the enemy. Fifteen minutes later, as an eerie darkness fell beneath the triple-canopy jungle, Pitsenbarger was hit and mortally wounded.

The next morning, when Army reinforcements reached the C Company survivors, a helicopter crew brought Pitsenbarger's body out of the jungle. Of the 180 men with whom he fought his last battle, only 14 were uninjured.

William H. Pitsenbarger was the first airman to be awarded the Air Force Cross posthumously. The Air Force Sergeants Association presents an annual award for valor in his honor.

The Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service is legendary for heroism in peace and war. No one better exemplifies its motto, "That Others May Live," than Bill Pitsenbarger. He descended voluntarily into the hell of a jungle firefight with valor as his only shield--and valor was his epitaph.

*First appeared in October 1983 issue.*

Additional Notes Continued:

On December 8, 2000 Airman First Class William H. Pitsenbarger was awarded the Medal of Honor in ceremonies conducted at Wright-Paterson Air Force Base. The award was presented by then Secretary of the Air Force F. Whitten Peters to A1C Pitsenbargers' father, William F. Pitsenbarger of Piqua OH.

## Citation

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, March 3, 1863, has awarded in then name of The Congress the Medal of Honor to

AIRMAN FIRST CLASS WILLIAM H. PITSENBARGER  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.

Airman First Class Pitsenbarger distinguished himself by extreme valor on 11 April 1966 near Cam My, Republic of Vietnam, while assigned as a Pararescue Crew Member, Detachment 6, 38<sup>th</sup> Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron.

On that date, Airman Pitsenbarger was aboard a rescue helicopter responding to a call for evacuation of casualties incurred in an ongoing firefight between elements of the United States Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division and a sizeable enemy force approximately 35 miles east of Saigon. With complete disregard for personal safety, Airman Pitsenbarger volunteered to ride a hoist more than 100 feet through the jungle, to the ground. On the ground, he organized and coordinated rescue efforts, cared for the wounded, prepared casualties for evacuation, and insured that the recovery operation continued in a smooth and orderly fashion.

Through his personal efforts, the evacuation of the wounded was greatly expedited. As each of the nine casualties evacuated that day were recovered, Airman Pitsenbarger refused evacuation in order to get more wounded soldiers to safety. After several pick-ups, one of the two rescue helicopters involved in the evacuation was struck by heavy enemy ground fire and was forced to leave the scene for an emergency landing. Airman Pitsenbarger stayed behind on the ground to perform medical duties.

Shortly thereafter, the area came under sniper and mortar fire. During a subsequent attempt to evacuate the site, American forces came under heavy assault by a large Viet Cong force. When the enemy launched the assault, the evacuation was called off and Airman Pitsenbarger took up arms with the besieged infantrymen. He courageously resisted the enemy, braving intense gunfire to gather and distribute vital ammunition to American defenders. As the battle raged on, he repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire to care for the wounded, pull them out of the line of fire, and return fire whenever he could, during which time he was wounded three times. Despite his wounds, he valiantly fought on, simultaneously treated as many wounded as possible. In the vicious fighting that followed, the American forces suffered 80% casualties as their perimeter was breached, and Airman Pitsenbarger was fatally wounded.

Airman Pitsenbarger exposed himself to almost certain death by staying on the ground, and perished while saving the lives of wounded infantrymen. His bravery and determination exemplify the highest professional standards and traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Air Force.

End of Citation

---

Tail No.: 62-4511      Model: HH-43      Date of Loss: 28 Oct 66      Unit: 38<sup>th</sup> ARRS, Pleiku  
Country of Loss: SVN      Call Sign: Pedro 42

Co-Pilot: George H. (Spike) Bonnell (12E-62)  
Flight Engineer: Francis D. Rice (11E-124)

Notes: Aircraft crashed while attempting to take off from base on a medical evacuation mission.

Additional Notes: From (FE) Bert Brundridge flying high bird in PEDRO 56.

When the Aircrews of DET9, 38th ARRS Pleiku were briefed on their upcoming mission, little did they realize that their determination and bravery would be tested to the limits. In the next 18 hours, the phrase “Those Things I Do, That Others May Live” would be demonstrated with tragic results.

It was the evening of October 28, 1966 and the U.S. Army 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was in contact with the NVA forces, 38 miles west of Pleiku AB, near the Cambodian Border. Several of the “Grunts” had been seriously wounded and required immediate evacuation. This was a region of triple canopy jungle where Army “Dust-off” helicopters were unable to land. Since the medevac would require a hoist operation, a request for assistance was forwarded to the USAF 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Rescue and Recovery Group Command Post at Tan Son Nhut.

At 21:15 hours local, Pedros 42 & 56 departed for the battle area. Once overhead, contact was established with the unit on the ground and the “hoist area” located. Procedures dictated that one H-43 hold a high orbit while the second, “Low Bird” was hoisting victims. This limited exposure and provided back up in the event one bird was lost. Trying to identify a hoist area in the jungle, at night, without lights and looking for a “Strobe Light” among the twinkling of ground fire is to say the least confusing. To add to that confusion, distracting strings of tracers reached up out of the jungle trying to locate the blacked-out Huskies. The deadly yellow and green lines seemed to be coming directly at each crewmember that observed them.

---

It was decided that Pedro 42 would be the first bird in. They would lower their PJ, A2C Alan Stanek, to prepare the wounded and speed up the evacuation. After Pedro 42 had received all the casualties they could carry, they would be replaced by Pedro 56. As with most plans in a battle, fate would deny its execution. Pedro 56 climbed to a high orbit at 4000 feet, while 42 hovered and lowered its PJ to the jungle floor. Things seemed to be progressing normally with three of the wounded taken aboard and a fourth being prepared on the ground.

Suddenly, the crew of Pedro 56 observed three strings of deadly tracers reach out from different directions and converge on Pedro 42. As everyone watched in the moonlight, the doomed Huskie faltered and settled into the jungle canopy. On the ground, A2C Stanek watched in horror as Pedro 42 tumbled 150 ft through the trees and came to rest and on fire. He rushed to the aid of his fallen comrades and with the help of some Infantrymen, pulled the two Pilots Capt Vermeys and 1/Lt "Spike" Bonnel to safety. Unfortunately, the fire consuming the aircraft was so intense that the Flight Engineer A2C "Dave" Rice and the three wounded could not be rescued.

The downing of Pedro 42 was coordinated with a fresh attack on the besieged 4<sup>th</sup> Division soldiers. Due to the intensity of the ground fire, Pedro 56 was unable to assist their fallen brothers. Five-six continued to orbit until fuel was running low and was then "ORDERED" to return to Pleiku, refuel and await a break in the fighting. The fighting continued throughout the night.

At dawn on the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup>, Pedro 56 launched to retrieve their friends and crewmates. Arriving back at the battle area, the two injured pilots and A2C Stanek were hoisted aboard and rushed to the 18<sup>th</sup> Army Surgical Hospital at Pleiku. Note: 1/Lt Bonnel was to take his "Final Flight" in November 1966 while still in the hospital at Clark AFB.

**(with thanks to Steve Mock of PedroNews at [http://users.acninc.net/padipaul/pnl015\\_07\\_06/main0706.htm](http://users.acninc.net/padipaul/pnl015_07_06/main0706.htm) )**

Tail No: 65-12779    Model: HH-3E    Date of Loss: 6 Feb 67    Unit: 38th ARRS  
Country of Loss: NVN    Call Sign: Jolly Green 05

Pilot: Patrick H. Wood (15E-1)  
Co-Pilot: Richard A. Kibbey (14E-129)  
Flight Engineer: Donald J. Hall (14E-129)

Notes: Helicopter was hit by ground fire while flying SAR for NAIL 65; crash site located atop 900 meter karst.

Additional Notes: Shot down 6 Feb 67 on his first mission flying an HH3E Jolly Green Giant rescue chopper. They just picked up a downed pilot and were leaving the area when they were hit with AA. The pararescueman, Duane Hackney was rescued shortly after winning the AF Cross for his efforts and eventually became a Chief Master Sergeant in the Security Police. He retired from a squadron which I commanded. Three others and my dad were MIA from that flight.

Lucius Heiskell, Donald Hall, and the other pilot were listed as missing in action and still are (I can't remember the pilots name, I'll send it later). He left behind my mom, me 45, brothers David 37 and John 32 and sister 44. Mom died eleven years later of a broken heart. She never remarried and only found contentment the last year of her life when the AF had a final determination board to settle life insurance and give finality that she really

needed. She didn't want to let go, but had given up all hope. We miss them both and remember them with fondness and much love. They were perfect parents like June and Ward Cleaver. Thanks

Lt. Col. Richard A. Kibbey Jr., USAF  
Tuesday, January 26, 1999

---

Tail No.:                    Model: HH-3E                    Date of Loss: 16Feb 67                    Unit: 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS, Quang Tri  
Country of Loss: Laos                    Call Sign: Jolly Green 56

Pilot: Angelo Pullara (15E-50)

Notes: Low Jolly Green was Jolly Green 56. High Jolly was Jolly Green 07. Attempted rescue of F-100 pilot Dusty 71. Dusty 82 was orbiting overhead 'till JG arrived. Location given as 045/19 off channel 72. Also given as XC8752 and later as coordinates 1555-10645.

Covey 54 (FAC) was overhead. Jolly Greens were out of Quang Tri. Info given (first) that ground fire came from left side, then right side. Last report from crew was "from 12 o'clock." Pullara died almost instantly after being hit. Co-pilot wounded in arm and somewhat confused as to where fire came from. Dusty 71 was on the side of a hill and ground fire was coming from valley floor and also from ridge line above pilot. Both Jolly Greens departed for Saravane without picking up the pilot. Sandy 5, Hobo 35 and others sanitized the area. Jolly Green 36 & 37 from NKP arrived. JG 36 (low bird) hit in aft end and reported a fuel cell hit also. More sanitation including napalm when Sandy 7 & 8 arrived. JG 37 made successful pickup of the pilot and RTB NKP.

From Tom Garcia.

---

Tail No.: 65-07932    Model: UH-1F                    Date of Loss: 31Mar 67                    Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> Helicopter Sq.  
Country of Loss: Laos                    Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: Robert L. Baldwin (17E-77)

Notes: Unarmed aircraft were performing a number of outstanding missions. Maj. Baldwin was the commander of "E" flight. Shot while in flight.

---

Tail No.:                    Model: GND                    Date of Loss: 7Nov 67                    Unit: 39<sup>th</sup> ARRS,  
Country of Loss: SVN                    Call Sign:

Non-Crew: Melvin O. Welborn (29E-46)

Notes:

---

Tail No: 66-13279    Model: HH-3E                    Date of Loss: 9 Nov 67                    Unit: 37th ARRS, DaNang

Country of Loss: Laos            Call Sign: Jolly Green 26

Co-Pilot: Ralph W. Brower (29E-56)  
Flight Engineer: Eugene L. Clay (29E-57)  
P.J.: Larry W. Maysey (29E-60)

Location of Loss: 161458N 1065258E (YC012973)

Notes: Aircraft was hit on takeoff by ground fire after MEDEVAC of USA personnel. Pilot awarded MOH for this mission. Additional Information: On November 8, 1967, two Air Force "Jolly Greens" (#26 and #29) from the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron were scrambled from DaNang Air Base at 1505 hours for an emergency extraction of five surviving members of a Special Forces reconnaissance team which had suffered heavy casualties while operating deep in a denied area in Laos. The recovery effort was to be recorded by the Squadron as one of the largest and most hazardous on record.

The two Air Force helicopters were advised by forward air control to hold while three Army UH1B gunships softened the area with rockets and machine gun fire. An Air Force C130 gunship, meanwhile, provided flare support for the mission. At 1630Z, Jolly Green 29 picked up the three indigenous personnel before being driven off by hostile fire. Damaged, Jolly Green 29 left and made an emergency landing at Khe Sanh. 20 minutes later, Jolly Green 26, flown by CAPT Gerald Young, with flight crew consisting of CAPT Ralph Brower, co-pilot; SSGT Eugene Clay, flight engineer; and SGT Larry Maysey, rescue specialist; braved the ground fire to pick up Special Forces SP4 Joseph G. Kusick and MSGT Bruce R. Baxter, both wounded. The helicopter was hit by automatic weapons fire, crashed and burst into flames.

By the afternoon of November 9, a recovery team was inserted into the area and reached the crash site of the burned HH3. Because of fading light, it was impossible to inspect the wreckage at that time.

On 10 November, the wreckage was searched and 3 charred remains were found. Two of the remains had identification tags which identified them as members of the crew. The third remains had no tags, but were identified as SP4 Kusick, radio operator of the reconnaissance team, as the long antenna from his PRC-25 radio were found on his body. Capt. Young had survived and was rescued 17 hours after the crash of the aircraft. About 34 meters downhill from the wreckage, another set of remains was found which were readily identified as MSgt. Baxter from the facial features. No trace was found of the third crew member. The remains of the two crewmen and Kusick were removed from the aircraft and placed with MSgt Baxter's remains so they could be hoisted as one lift into a hovering helicopter. The identification tags of the crewmembers were placed with the remains. Weather conditions and enemy action would not permit helicopters to make the extraction either that day or the day following.

The remains of the crew and passengers aboard Jolly Green 26 were never recovered. Although the location of the crash is known, the bodies of the crew and recon team who died still lie on foreign soil. The five are among nearly 600 Americans lost in Laos.

The Air Force has dedicated three buildings to the memory of Larry Maysey, at Los Angeles AFB, California, at Randolph AFB, Texas, and at Hickam AFB, Hawaii.

Tail No: 62-4525      Model: HH-43      Date of Loss: 7 Feb 68      Unit: Det 9, 38<sup>th</sup> ARRS, Pleiku  
Country of Loss: Kontum, SVN      Call Sign: Pedro 56

Flight Engineer: Jose G. Abara (37E-76)

Notes: Assisting in the recovery of the crew of a downed Army helicopter, helicopter hit by ground fire near Kontum, caught fire, crashed ten seconds later; three of the four crewmembers survived the crash.

---

Tail No.: 66-13295      Model: CH-3E      Date of Loss: 23 May 68      Unit: 21st Helicopter Sq., 56th  
ACW  
Country of Loss: SVN      Call Sign: Dusty 51

Pilot: James P. McCollum (66E-12)  
Co-Pilot: William H. Taylor (67E-03)  
Flight Engineer: John L. Coon (66E-05)  
Flight Engineer: John E. Albanese (66E-07)  
Crew Chief: Robert A. Fink (66E-09)

Notes: Helicopter was lost to unknown causes while flying a sensor delivery mission, crash site could not be reached due to heavy enemy activity. This was the first combat loss for the 21<sup>st</sup> SOS.

Additional Note: Crew remains were eventually recovered.

---

Tail No.: 67-14710      Model: HH-3E      Date of Loss: 9 Jun 68      Unit: 37th ARRS  
Country of Loss: SVN      Call Sign: Jolly Green 23

Pilot: Jack Rittichier (58W-14)  
Co-Pilot: Richard C. Yeend, Jr. (58W-17)  
Flight Engineer: Elmer L. Holden (58W-9)  
P.J.: James D. Locker (58W-10)

Location of Loss: 162144 North 107053 East

Notes: JOLLY GREEN 23 was flying a SAR mission for HELLBORNE 215, a USMC A-4E piloted by 1Lt Walter R. Schmidt Jr. (MIA), who was downed northwest of the A Shau Valley. Voice contact was established with the survivor, who reported he possibly had a broken leg. Several attempts at pickup were made by the lead helicopter, JG22, but they were unsuccessful due to the intense ground fire.

After suppressive fire was put in, JG23 moved in to attempt the pickup, JG23 reported taking hits and then caught fire. The pilot attempted to land in a small clearing, but the helicopter exploded when it hit the ground and burned intensely. There were no indications anyone survived the crash.

The pilot of JG23, LTJG Jack Rittichier, was a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter pilot, he is the only USCG man who is unaccounted for in SEA and was the first USCG casualty of the Vietnam War. He was part of a pilot exchange program between the USAF and Coast Guard.

Additional Information: JOLLY GREEN 23 was flying a SAR mission for HELLBORNE 215, a USMC A-4E piloted by 1Lt Walter R. Schmidt Jr. (MIA), who was downed northwest of the A Shau Valley, in the middle of a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) encampment, thirty seven miles west of Hue RVN. Voice contact was established with the survivor, who reported he possibly had a broken arm and leg. The enemy was using him as bait to lure SAR aircraft, especially the very vulnerable Jolly Green Giants, within killing range. Air strikes pounded the area and brutalized the enemy, but with little effect.

Three times the lead helicopter, JG22, attempted to reach Schmidt, but they were unsuccessful due to the intense ground fire. When that Jolly was forced to depart because of low fuel, Jim's aircraft assumed the low bird role. After suppressive fire was put in, JG23 moved in to attempt the pickup. The crew fought its way in but was forced to withdraw. Again it went in, this time surrounded by gun ships, but again the enemy met them head on. As the crew hovered over the survivor, bullets punched into the aircraft and it began to burn. The pilot of Jolly Green 23 attempted to land in a small clearing, but the helicopter exploded when it hit the ground and burned intensely, killing Jim Locker and all the others on board.

The pilot of JG23, LTJG Jack Rittichier, was a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter pilot. He is the only USCG man who is unaccounted for in SEA and was the first USCG casualty of the Vietnam War. He was part of a pilot exchange program between the USAF and Coast Guard.

The Air Force has dedicated two buildings to the memory of Jim Locker, at Keesler AFB, Mississippi and at Wright Patterson AFB, Ohio.

---

Tail No.:                    Model: HH-43                    Date of Loss: 27Sep 67                    Unit: 38<sup>th</sup> ARRS,  
Country of Loss: SVN                    Call Sign:

Pilot: David H. Pittard (42W-32)

Notes: Killed by hostile ground fire.

---

Tail No: 65-12782    Model: HH-3E                    Date of Loss: 5 Oct 68                    Unit: 37th ARRS  
Country of Loss: Laos                    Call Sign: Jolly Green 10

Co-Pilot: Albert D. Wester (41W-16)

Flight Engineer: Gregory P. Lawrence (41W-13)

Notes: While attempting to extract a Special Forces team in contact with the enemy, the aircraft received intensive ground fire which damaged aircraft, followed by a fire.

Additional Information: On October 5, 1968 the Jolly Greens were called upon by the Army to extract a Special Forces team, call sign "Carrot Top", from the A Shau Valley in Laos. Two Jolly Green helicopters were sent

out along with a team of Sky Raiders to rescue the team. The first JG went in under heavy ground fire attack and received damage to their fuel lines and had to abort the mission and return to the base. The second helicopter was JG10. The 4 crew members of JG10 were Dwayne Wester; Co-Pilot, Vernon Granier; Pilot, Dean Casbeer; PJ and Greg Lawrence; FE. These 4 men braved enemy fire to try to rescue the team on the ground but it proved to be too much for them. The JG10 was shot down about 500 meters from the pick up point. The PJ was able to pull the pilot from the burning helicopter but before he could return the JG10 exploded, claiming the lives of the 2 trapped inside. Another JG was sent out to rescue the Special Forces team and the 2 survivors from JG10. The mission was completed and they returned back to DaNang with their helicopter full and their hearts saddened. They had lost 2 Jolly Greens that day, their friends, and their brothers of war.

Additional Information:

Bowling Green (Kentucky) Daily News (Inter-Net 10/7/2000)

Pain over missing father lingers

Butler County woman's father's plane went down in Vietnam in 1968, but his body has never been found

By Alicia Carmichael, [acarmichael@bgdailynews.com](mailto:acarmichael@bgdailynews.com) --

270-783-3234

MORGANTOWN

— As the Air Force helicopter known as the “Jolly Green Giant” prepared to descend into North Vietnamese fire to rescue an Army Special Forces unit in jungle-covered Laos on Oct. 5, 1968, Maj. Don Dineen cried out in protest from his A-1 Skyraider airplane, he said. A first chopper attempting the mission had been hit by enemy fire and barely survived – making it back to Da Nang “soaked in fuel,” said Dineen, who was dropping bombs and Napalm and “anything to keep the bad guys from shooting at them. “I screamed over the radio, ‘Don’t do it,’” Dineen said Wednesday from Fort Walton Beach Fla., where he lives as a 68-year-old retired Air Force lieutenant colonel and Realtor. “By that time, they were already hit.” The chopper went down, and just two of the four men aboard survived, Dineen said.

One of those killed, according to reports, was Sgt. Gregory Paul Lawrence of Alabama, a 30-year-old father of three. Lawrence reportedly was impaled on his own machine gun when the gun struck a tree as the helicopter crashed to the ground, said his daughter, 34-year-old Deborah Webster of Morgantown. Because of heavy cloud cover, it took two hours for rescue crews – including Dineen – to reach the crash site to help the crash survivors and the Special Forces unit, he said. Lawrence and a pilot never were found. Webster has been told the men’s bodies were burned when the helicopter exploded into flames.

Most days, Webster believes that tale. Other days, she harbors doubts and hopes. “Every day,” she wonders if her father might have lived at least a little while, she said. She was told that a former Vietnamese soldier who witnessed the crash said during an interview years later that he had helped bury three Americans after the chopper went down, she said. “But he couldn’t pinpoint the location because jungles grow up, scenery changes,” Webster said. Besides, only two men are thought to have died in the crash.

It took the American government more than 20 years to return to Laos to find wreckage of the helicopter, Webster said. And by 1994, much of the wreckage had been washed away by monsoons, she said. “They waited 20 years before they would even discuss anything with the families about it,” she said. “... All the stalling and hem-hawing, around – it’s hard to be patriotic.”

Because no remains were found near that helicopter's wreckage, another crash site with remains took precedence, Webster said. The site of the crash that claimed Lawrence's life is to be excavated in 2002, Webster said. Lawrence still is listed as "Missing in Action," even though he is believed to have been dead for decades. Now, Webster wants an ending to her story.

"I don't have a grave to go and put flowers on," she said. "... He's still over there, and that bothers me a lot. He's not buried here, where he's supposed to be."

It may seem impossible for Webster to have a grave for her father – especially if he were burned in a fire hot enough to melt metal, as Webster has been told. But she finds hope in tidbits of news, including the government's recent recovery of two Navy aviators' bodies from waters off the coast of Vietnam. She knows a son of a victim of the Navy crash, she said. She met him through the national support group Sons and Daughters in Touch, which was formed to help children who lost their fathers in Vietnam. The Navy aviator's son has inspired Webster to write letters to the government and to talk to people who may have known her dad, she said. "He fought a very long time to get a case for his dad, because it's so hard to find remains in water," she said.

The Vietnam Veterans memorial in Washington also has inspired Webster. "My dad's still missing, so there's no grave to go visit, just The Wall," she said. Webster went to the memorial on Father's Day 1999 and was interviewed there by Beverly Kirk, a former Bowling Green resident who was reporting for NBC's "Dateline." In a clip from the "Dateline" show, Webster is shown placing a memorial of photos below her father's name.

Later, tears stream down her face. Webster now fears the government will cut off in 2004 funding for the Joint Task Force, which investigates the cases of MIAs and prisoners of war from Vietnam, she said. It's not something she wants to let happen. "As a daughter of an MIA and as a member of Sons and Daughters in Touch, I, for one, do not plan to let this issue end come 2004," she wrote in a letter to the Daily News.

Webster was just 2 years old when the crash believed to have killed her father happened. "I grew up in the '70s, and Vietnam was not something you talked about," she said. "The only father figure I had was my granddaddy – my mom's dad." She recalls a second- or third-grade assignment in which a teacher asked the class to write about their parents. Webster wrote that her father had been killed in the Vietnam War and was admonished by the teacher. "My teacher said, 'We don't say that,'" she said. "'We just say he's deceased.'" Such attitudes made Webster apprehensive about trying to talk about or find out about her father.

But a few years ago, Webster decided to look on the Internet for information about MIAs.

The search – and information she posted about her father's crash on a Web site – led Dineen to contact Webster. It was the first such contact Webster had received, she said. In his 1998 e-mail to Webster, Dineen wrote, "I have spent almost 30 years wondering if I did everything that I could or should have done to prevent the loss, just as you have spent the same time wondering WHY. It was my responsibility to suppress the ground fire and make it safe for (jolly greens) to make the pickup."

That e-mail led Webster to try to find others who may have known something about the day her father died. Stephen D. Engelke, a Green Beret among those Lawrence was trying to rescue in Laos, also wrote to Webster. In a February e-mail, he wrote, "I received the Silver Star, Bronze Star (with valor) and the Purple Heart, but I am most proud of my 'Order of the Jolly Green Giant' which is only awarded to those rescued by the Jollys. ...

Deb, even though I never met your Dad, he has lived in my heart and mind all these years. He was a far braver man than I ever was or could be.”

Men like Dwane Beland of Alaska, who knew Lawrence during the war, have sent Webster photos of her father and patches from their uniforms that match those he would have worn, Webster said. Beland even sent Webster aerial photos he took of the explosion that wracked her father’s helicopter.

Knowing her dad meant so much to so many has helped Webster continue her search for information about him, she said. She and her brother, who was just a baby when their father died, and her older sister all work to learn as much as they can. They attend meetings in Washington, where they are briefed by government leaders on the status of MIA and POW cases, and they search the Internet for anyone who might have information.

Their mother, who has married and divorced twice since Lawrence’s death, also has attended a meeting, Webster said, adding that her mother never got over her first husband’s death. “There she was, left with three kids,” Webster said. “She didn’t have the luxury or time to think about the grieving process. Today, I can see it in her eyes how much it hurts.” Still, Webster doesn’t wish her father was alive, she said. She said it would be “selfish” to want that.

Through her research, she has learned that it was his dream to fight for his country – he joined the Air Force and volunteered for Vietnam after serving in the Army a few years earlier – and to fly on a chopper. She has learned that, in his spare time in Vietnam, Lawrence wrote letters to his family and built model planes and helicopters.

If she could do just one thing in her life, she said, Webster would like to go back to tell her father goodbye. “I’d want to go back to June of ’68 to tell my dad bye,” she said. “My dad went because he wanted to. He went and fulfilled his dream of flying.”

She now realizes that her life would have been different had her father lived, she said. He would have built a career in the military, and the family would have moved often, she said. She probably never would have moved from Alabama, where she grew up, to Kentucky with her first husband. She never would have met her second husband, Billy, she said. And she wouldn’t have had her three children or a job she enjoys, working as a quality inspector for Kerr Group in Bowling Green, she said.

“It would change my whole life ...,” she said. “I’m happy in my life, and I think my dad looks down and sees that I’m happy in my life, and he’s happy.”

Republished with the permission of David Bauer, editor Daily News of Bowling Green, Ky.

---

Tail No.: 58-1845    Model: HH-43B    Date of Loss: 10 Oct 68    Unit: 38th ARRS, Phan Rang  
Country of Loss: SVN    Call Sign: Pedro 44

Pilot: Von M. Liedernecht (41W-40)  
Co-Pilot: Donald Brooks (41W-38)  
Firefighter: Millard Bledsoe (41W-38)  
Firefighter: Emmett Orr (41W-42)

Medic: Angel Luna (41W-41)

Notes: crashed at Phan Rang AB as a result of control problems, control surface hit blades, which caused blades to separate.

Additional Notes: On 10 October 1968, at approximately 2037 hours an HH-43B helicopter (Call Sign Pedro 44) SN 58-1845, assigned to Detachment 1, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, Phan Rang AB, Republic of Vietnam, crashed and burned while on an emergency intercept mission. A B-57 aircraft had declared an in-flight emergency and Pedro 44 was scrambled with the fire suppression kit (FSK) to standby for the emergency landing. During the landing roll out of the B-57, Pedro 44 entered a left hand climbing turn as if departing the area for return to the alert pad. Almost simultaneously, and without any radio transmission, the helicopter crashed and burned inflicting fatal injuries to all five aircrew members. Firefighting equipment and medical assistance, already on hand for the B-57 emergency, responded immediately to the scene, extinguishing the fire within 15 seconds and immediately removed the crewmembers from the aircraft. (TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM THE ACCIDENT REPORT DATED 18 OCTOBER 1968 BY LT. COL. ROBERT M. FOSTER)

WHAT HAPPENED : The primary cause of this major aircraft accident was material failure of the azimuth bar to "L" crank rod. This caused an in-flight disintegration of the rotor system and loss of aircraft control.

Additional Note: Millard Bledsoe and Emmett Orr were Firemen, Angel Luna was a Medic – contributed by Gary Pruitt 4/30/2006

---

Tail No.: 65-07942    Model: UH-1F    Date of Loss: 27 Nov 68    Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Cambodia    Call Sign: Green Hornet

Crew Chief: Gene P. Stuijbergen (38W-79)

Notes: On 27 November 1968 SSGT Gene P. Stuijbergen, Flight Engineer, and a native of Augusta, Michigan, was aboard a UH-1F slick on a combat mission over Phu Nhai Village; Rotanokiri Prov., Cambodia, 10 miles west of Duc Lo, SVN. On this mission, his crew attempted to infiltrate a combined 6-man U.S. Army Special Forces and South Vietnamese Forces Team into an enemy bivouac area situated in a deep ravine and surrounded by heavy jungle. As the heavily laden Huey began its steep approach into a ten foot hover, it immediately came under a fusillade of enemy anti-aircraft and small arms fire. During the melee, an enemy round ripped through the flight controls, causing the aircraft to crash into the landing zone and burst into flames. The pilots, a gunner, and two American team members escaped the inferno, but SSGT Stuijbergen and the remainder of the team were hopelessly trapped; apparently dying underneath the burning wreckage. Only five of the ten onboard were rescued. Several desperate attempts were made to rescue and recover SSGT Stuijbergen and the remainder of the team but became futile due to stiff enemy resistance. SSGT Stuijbergen is presently listed officially in the "Presumptive status of Dead, Body not recovered," and is the first 20<sup>th</sup> SOS enlisted crewmember to perish in combat operations.

---

Tail No.:                    Model: HH-3E                    Date of Loss: 25Dec 68                    Unit: 40<sup>th</sup> ARRS, NKP, THA

Country of Loss: Laos

Call Sign: Jolly Green 17

PJ: Charles D. King (36W-76)

Location of Loss: 170600N 1055600E (WD980925)

Notes: On Christmas Eve, 1968, an F-105, call sign "Panda 0 I", was shot down over Laos between the city of Ban Phaphilang and the Ban Karai Pass. Its pilot, Major Charles R. Brownlee, successfully ejected and his parachute drifted into an area known to be occupied by enemy troops. These troops had in the past aggressively pursued downed pilots and contested SAR efforts. Two HH-3E's, Jolly Green's 15 and 17, on airborne alert immediately proceeded to the incident site. Upon arrival, the Sandy's placed them in a high orbit. The on-scene commander discovered a parachute in the trees. Numerous attempts were made to raise Major Brownlee on his survival radio. It was late in the day and darkness quickly covered the jungle. There was no survival radio contact from Major Brownlee. The rescue helicopters did not have a night combat rescue capability and were ordered to return to NKP.

A first light SAR was organized to return to the area on Christmas Day. The crew of Jolly low were all volunteers: Major Reinhart, aircraft commander, Captain Gibson, co-pilot, Sergeant Gallagher, flight engineer, and A1C Charles D. King, pararescueman. Once again the Jolly's were placed in a high orbit and the Sandy's began trolling for ground fire. Enemy troops did not take the bait. Not drawing any ground fire Sandy lead told Jolly low to attempt a pickup. As the helicopter came into a hover over the parachute, Sergeant Gallagher saw a man hanging from the parachute by his harness. The man was not moving and was hanging only a couple of feet off the ground. Sergeant King volunteered to descend on the forest penetrator to rescue the downed pilot. Major Reinhart was not thrilled about the idea of lowering his PJ to the ground, but realized that it was the only way to rescue Major Brownlee. Just as Doug King reached the ground, enemy troops began firing, first at the helicopter and then at the men on the ground. King freed Major Brownlee from his parachute and secured him to the penetrator. He signaled Sergeant Gallagher to reel them up.

Only a few feet off the ground, Doug King called on the radio, "I'm hit, I'm hit, pull up, pull up." Normally, the men on the penetrator would be hoisted clear of the trees prior to the rescue helicopter resuming forward flight. But enemy troops were hosing the helicopter with effective small arms fire. Staying in the hover until the two men cleared the tree tops would certainly result in the helicopter being shot down, crashing right on top of Major Brownlee and Airman King. Out of options and seriously battle damaged, Major Reinhart was forced to leave the stable hover. To optimize the chances of the men on the penetrator, he elected to ascend straight up. He hoped that this maneuver would lift the two men clear of the trees, prior to instituting forward flight. As the helicopter moved up, the hoist cable or the forest penetrator caught on a tree and the hoist cable snapped, dropping King and Brownlee about 10 feet to the ground. Badly injured from the fall and wounded by enemy small arms fire Airman King made one last radio call, "Jolly, get out of here, they're almost on top of me."

The seriously damaged helicopter was forced off the scene due to the intense ground fire. Enemy troops swarmed over Major Brownlee and Airman King. The Sandy's could not fire on the enemy because they would hit their own men.

Two days of searching and numerous radio calls from air rescue aircraft to Airman King went unanswered. He was declared missing in action and later promoted in sequence with other MIA's to Chief Master Sergeant. He was never heard from again. Sergeant Charles Douglas King was officially declared killed in action on 5

December 1978. He was awarded the Air Force Cross posthumously. King was also awarded the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal and Purple Heart for earlier rescue missions he participated in.

No news surfaced about King or Brownlee until February 1986, when a Lao refugee came to the United States and reported that he had witnessed King's capture, and watched as he was taken away in a truck. The refugee's story matched most details of King's loss incident. Less clear were the details of Brownlee's fate.

In 1993 US officials were allowed into the Central Army Museum in Hanoi, where personal items from American casualties were kept. They found an identification card with Charles Douglas King's name, service number and date of birth. A North Vietnamese witness was found who stated "a pilot was pulling up another pilot to the helicopter when the cable broke. Both pilots died."

Additional Information: The following is a press release dated December 17, 1998, from Sherry King, Doug King's sister:

Christmas Day 1998 will mark the Thirtieth Year Anniversary of a rescue mission in the jungles of Laos, where a Muscatine, IA native gave his life in an attempt to rescue a downed Air Force pilot, Major Charles R. Brownlee, of Alamosa, CO.

Doug King had only a few weeks left in Vietnam and had his orders to go stateside. It was a dangerous mission that Christmas Day but he volunteered to go. He was trained as a Special Forces Pararescueman for this kind of mission.

For ten years he was listed as missing in action. Every attempt was and still is being made for a full accounting.

In 1993, a delegation of United States Congressmen went to North Vietnam. They, along with the Joint Casualty Resolution Center, were allowed in the Central Army Museum in Hanoi. In that museum, they found a Geneva Convention card with Doug's name, rank, service number, and date of birth. With that card, was an envelope with the same information plus some writing in Vietnamese. The information of the letter indicated that he had been shot and killed that Christmas Day in 1968.

"I think it's important for people who knew and loved him to bring some closer to 30 years of not knowing what had happened. We are more fortunate than some MIA families, as we have some information. Our efforts continue for a full accounting."

During his missing status, he was promoted from Airman First Class to Chief Master Sergeant. He received the Air Medal on July 4, 1968. He was awarded the Air Force Cross, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Silver Star, The Purple Heart and the Air Medal ( First Oak Leaf Cluster) posthumously for his extraordinary heroism. Doug has been recognized and honored for his professional dedication, his courage and valor throughout our nation by the USAF naming a dormitory, King Manor at Andrews AFB, near Washington, D.C., on June 12, 1979. At Scott AFB, Illinois, 1st Street was renamed King Street in his honor on June 28, 1979. On February 27, 1990, a new dormitory was named King Manor at March AFB, California, and on November 15, 1996 at Hickham AFB, Hawaii, building 1856 was dedicated to his memory for paying the ultimate price as a young Pararescueman in South East Asia.

Signed : Sherry L King (sister)

---

Tail No.: 63-13164    Model: UH-1F    Date of Loss: 03 Jan 69    Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Cambodia    Call Sign: Green Hornet

Gunner: Ronald P Zenga (35W-31)

Notes: Aircraft was shot down near Duc Lap while attempting to rescue a Special Forces patrol. The aircraft was struck by intense ground fire while coming to a hover to attempt a McGuire Rig extraction. After taking eight hits the aircraft departed the area and the gunships suppressed the ground fire. A second approach was made. As they came to a hover above the trees enemy fire struck the fuel cells setting the aircraft on fire. They were able to accelerate the aircraft and attempted a landing in a small jungle clearing less than 500 meters from the enemy forces surrounding the Special Forces patrol. The engine failed just short of the clearing and the helicopter crashed into the trees. Sgt. Zenga was pinned under the aircraft and died in the ensuing fire.

---

Tail No: 62-12582    Model: CH-3C    Date of Loss: 17 Jan 69    Unit: 20th SOS, Udorn  
Country of Loss: Laos    Call Sign: Pony Express 20

Pilot: Walter W. Martin (34W-26)  
Co-Pilot: Richard A. Fleming (34W-23)  
Flight Engineer: Albert J. Davis (34W-22)

Location of Loss: 20 02'N 103 28'E

Notes: Helicopter was hit by small arms fire while hovering, no further information on this loss; mission was TACAN site support.

Additional Narrative:

Don Deidrich's account on the loss of CH-3, 62-12582

In Jan 1969, 3 men were sent from the 1st Mobil Communications Group (1st Mob) in the Philippines to Udorn AB Thailand , TSgt Juan A. Maldonado (team chief), Sgt. Bill Chambers III, and myself, Sgt. Donald Deidrich ( I was chosen as I had been on the team that had installed the TACAN there 6 months before).

We were to repair the TACAN at LS-36 and train some personnel at the 1973 Comm. Sq. at Udorn. When we arrived at Udorn we found that another man, in country, from the 1st Mob, that had been re-directed, had repaired the TACAN at LS-36 and then went to PS-21 ( 20-30 miles south west of Saravan ) to repair that TACAN, it was decided to send two of us to Ubon to repair it, Bill and I departed for Ubon.

There we were supported by the 20th SOS Pony Express, about the 17th of Jan we heard about the accident at LS-36 TACAN site. I heard from numerous people, My Commander, Pony Express , and 1973 comm. personnel that I knew, and the accounts are very much in agreement.

The CH3 Pony Express left Udorn with 8 people (5 air crew, 3 passengers, Col. Bolant (?) Juan and the new TACAN maintenance man) and 10 barrels of diesel fuel.

They arrived at LS-36 and found that the Air America Huey was on a mission and they would have to wait. It was decided to fly the CH-3 to the TACAN site.

There was a restriction on the landing anything bigger than a UH-1 at the site as the pad was very small and the winds were unpredictable. During the landing one of the air crew heard something about the "emergency brake" over the intercom, the chopper rolled forward and went over the edge of the hill ( almost a cliff ) tipped over and exploded.

Three people were thrown / jumped clear, they were the crew chief (I think), a door gunner, and the 1973 Comm. Sq. TACAN man. All three were injured and evacuated back to Udorn and then to the Philippines. I don't remember any names other than those I mentioned.

LS-36 was lost to the enemy on the 1st of March 1969, the TACAN site was destroyed by air strikes. An account that mentions the loss of this chopper can be found on the Air Commando web site, under the 20th SOS. Thank you very much for listening to me, and if I can be of any assistance help please let me know.

---

Tail No.: 63-13158    Model: UH-1F    Date of Loss: 26 Mar 69    Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Khanh Hoa, SVN    Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: Frank A. DiFiglia (28W-44) 20<sup>th</sup> SOS Commander  
Maintenance Officer: Walter C. Booth (28W-43)  
Flight Surgeon: Robert W. Fields (28W-45) 20<sup>th</sup> SOS  
Gunner: Jesse C. Bowman (28W-43)  
Gunner: Antonio L. Alho (28W-42)

Notes: From the 20<sup>th</sup> SOS History: Aircraft crashed and burned near Duc My, SVN, 12 minutes north of Nha Trang SVN. The crash sequence began at 4,000' when a severe vibration or beat began. Auto-rotation was initiated. During the descent control of the aircraft was lost causing subsequent destruction of the main rotor which in turn severed the tail boom. First the severe beat, then the uncontrollability, followed by the separation of aircraft access doors, subsequently the main rotor underwent violent stresses and the severing of the tail boom. The sequence began with the catastrophic failure of the tail rotor which was possibly caused by hostile fire impacting on a critical component causing an unbalanced condition or failure leading to a severe beat or vibration.

---

Tail No.: 65-07937    Model: UH-1F    Date of Loss: 13 Apr 69    Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Pleiku, SVN    Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: James O. Lynch (27W-75)

Notes: Shot down by ground fire attempting to extract a reconnaissance team. Captain Lynch was killed by hostile ground fire.

---

Tail No.: 59-1562    Model: HH-43    Date of Loss: 19 Jul 69    Unit: 38<sup>th</sup> ARRS, U-Tapao RTAFB  
Country of Loss: Thailand    Call Sign: Pedro 70

Pilot: Warren K. Davis (20W-18)  
P.J.: Harry Cohen (02E-40)

Notes: flying SAR for burning B-52 at U-Tapao, B-52 exploded causing the helicopter to crash.

Additional Notes: From Lt. Col. Mike Sanders

I was the navigator on the last of 3 B-52's comprising the first of two cells in a 6-ship "wave" departing from U-Tapao for a bomb run on 19 July 1969. The weather was terrible--heavy tropical rain. We were on our departure, monitoring the progress of the wave, when we realized that the second cell never came up on frequency. We then heard several transmissions of "Pedro seven-zero this is U-Tapao tower on guard. Do you copy?"

When we returned from the bomb run, we discovered that the second cell lead B52, accelerating in the heavy rain, noticed an out-of-limit difference between the pilot's and copilot's airspeed indicators and aborted the take-off. They slowed down quickly but, in an attempt to clear the runway for the remaining two B52s, they pushed up the thrust levers to get to the end of the runway sooner.

The crew sped up too much, however, and the aircraft--carrying about 300,000 lbs of fuel and 108 500-pound bombs--skidded off the runway into a ditch. The tail gunner popped his turret, slid down a rope, and was picked up by a maintenance crew who drove to the safety of a revetment. The remaining crewmembers escaped through overhead escape hatches at the front of the plane and were picked up by rescue personnel. By this time, the HH-43 rescue helicopter Pedro 70 was overhead.

When the ground rescue personnel only counted five of the six-man crew (they were unaware that the gunner had been rescued), they told everyone including Pedro that there was a man still in the B52. Pedro decided to stay on station until the missing crewmember was located.

This was a fatal decision--the B52 exploded (the largest piece saw at the crash scene later was about the size of a Volkswagon bus) and Pedro was slammed into the ground, ultimately killing two of its crew. These were the only fatalities in the incident.

Thomas M ("Mike") Sanders  
Lt Col, USAF Ret

---

Tail No.: UNKNOWN    Model: O-2A    Date of Loss: 13 Sep 69    Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> SOS, Ton Son Nhut  
Country of Loss: SVN    Call Sign: UNKNOWN

Captain Thomas W. Norman (18W-78)  
Captain James F. Cameron (18W-78)

Notes: The two 20<sup>th</sup> SOS pilots were killed when they were shot down by ground fire when their O-2A Skymaster sustained battle damage and crashed on the morning of 13 Sep 69.

*(ED: ANYONE WITH ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION – PLEASE CONTACT Jim Henthorn)*

---

Tail No.:                      Model: HH-53C                      Date of Loss: 5Dec 69                      Unit: 40<sup>th</sup> ARRS, NKP, THA  
Country of Loss: Laos                      Call Sign:

PJ: David M. Davison (15W-27)

Notes: A1C David M. DAVISON, was killed while on a combat rescue mission. He was manning the rear gun of the HH-53C helicopter during the rescue attempt when he was hit by ground fire. The aircraft commander proceeded directly to Nakhon Phanom Airfield, Thailand, where Airman Davison was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital. – Source: USAF Official Casualty Information

Additional Information (forwarded by CWO(ret) Robert Destatte): Following is an extract:

(More Information at <http://www.virtualwall.org/dd/DanielsonBF01a.htm>)

On 05 Dec 1969 two F-4C Phantoms from the 558th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Cam Ranh Bay were tasked against a choke point on the Ho Chi Minh Trail near Ban Phanop in southern Laos. The wing position was flown by Capt Benjamin F. Danielson, pilot, and 1stLt Woodrow J. Bergeron, navigator, in F-4C tail number 63-7444 using the call sign "Boxer 22".

As Boxer 22 was passing through 6000 feet while pulling off after its first attack the F-4 was hit by 37mm antiaircraft fire. Danielson turned toward South Vietnam but lost aircraft control and the crew was forced to eject a few miles east of the target. Both men reached ground safely but were several hundred yards apart and on opposite sides of a river. Worse yet, they landed in an area heavily populated by well-armed and unfriendly NVA troops. The only good news was that Danielson and Bergeron could communicate with each other and with supporting aircraft using their survival radios.

SAR efforts began at once but the rescue helicopters found themselves flying into a virtual storm of fire. At least 7 helicopters from Nakhon Phanom and Udorn made rescue attempts, and all were shot up with one crewman killed in action: A1C David M. Davison, 40th ARRS, in HH-53C tail number 68-8283. A total of 88 SAR sorties were flown before sundown on the 5th, but to no avail.

The SAR forces returned at first light on the 6th, with fixed-wing aircraft hosing down the area in an attempt to suppress the ground fire. During the morning hours Bergeron advised that he heard shouts and gunfire from the area where Danielson was hiding and that he'd not been able to contact Danielson since. Fixed-wing aircraft laid smoke screens for the helicopters, but repeated rescue efforts ended with shot-up helicopters and no success (one HH-53 got stuck in a tree and was able to break loose only by breaking the tree). A total of 154 sorties were flown on the 6th, but at sundown Bergeron still was on the ground. After sundown, Bergeron could hear NVA troops using dogs in an attempt to find him amongst the bamboo and tall grass in the river valley. The SAR attempts began again at sunrise on the 7th with fixed-wing strikes on the NVA positions, but the first HH-53 in was driven off by ground fire. Following additional air strikes, another smoke tunnel was laid and an HH-53C was brought in, flanked by A-1 Skyraiders blasting away at everything in sight. Bergeron saw the

approaching helicopter and broke cover, heading toward the river. The HH-53C crew spotted Bergeron, dropped a rescue hoist, and reeled him in.

The SAR effort extended over 51 hours and involved a total of 366 aircraft sorties. Although Bergeron's evidence indicated Captain Danielson had been located by the NVA and apparently killed in a shootout, there was no positive evidence of Danielson's death. He was carried as Missing in Action until 19 July 1976, when the Secretary of the Air Force approved a Presumptive Finding of Death.

PACOM Joint Personnel Accounting Command recently recovered partial remains of Captain Danielson, one of the downed pilots that A1C Davison and his crew mates were trying to rescue.

---

Tail No.: 66-14434    Model: HH-53B    Date of Loss: 28 Jan 70    Unit: 40th ARRS,  
Country of Loss: NVN    Call Sign: Jolly Green 71

Pilot: Holly G. Bell (14W-73)  
Co-Pilot: Leonard C. Leeser (14W-75)  
Flight Engineer: William C. Shinn (14W-77)  
P.J.: William D. Pruett (14W-76)  
P.J.: William C. Sutton (14W-77)  
Other: Gregory L. Anderson (Photographer) (14W-73)

Notes: hit by missile fired from MIG during SAR for SEABIRD 02 (F-105G). The Mig-21 was piloted by Vu Ngoc Dinh who then had 6 total kills. He was with the 921st Flight Regiment.

---

Tail No.: 64-15491    Model: UH-1P    Date of Loss: 14 Mar 70    Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Duc Lap, Quang Duc, SVN    Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: Dana A. Dilley (13W-126)

Notes: Crashed in the jungle while flying in support of a LRRP mission due to suspected enemy ground fire. An Army slick also on the mission landed near the crash and transported the injured to the hospital at Cam Rahn Bay.

---

Tail No.: 65-07944    Model: UH-1P    Date of Loss: 19 Mar 70    Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Darlac, SVN    Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: Clyde W. Enderle (12W-20)  
Co-Pilot: Carlos A. Estrada (12W-21)  
Gunner: James W. Greenwood (12W-21)

Notes: Shot down by enemy ground fire southeast of Ban Me Thuot, SVN. Second gunner was thrown clear and survived. This occurred during a training flight consisting of a two ship formation.

---

Tail No: 66-13280    Model: HH-3E    Date of Loss: 15 Apr 70    Unit: 37th ARRS  
Country of Loss: Kontum, SVN    Call Sign: Jolly Green 27

Pilot: Travis H. Scott, Jr. (11W-9)  
Flight Engineer: Gerald L. Hartzel (11W-27)

Notes: Caught fire, FE died of wounds after.

Additional Notes:

Location Dak Nay, SVN

Description: MAJ Travis Wofford and CPT Travis W. Scott, Jr., both won the Air Force Cross during a rescue operation near Dak Nay Puey, Vietnam. Two H-3s were scrambled from Da Nang, Vietnam, to rescue survivors of a downed UH-1. The first H-3 to go into the rescue area made three attempts, but enemy ground fire downed this aircraft, piloted by CPT Scott, who was killed on impact. The copilot, MAJ Wofford, dragged the other two crewmen from the burning aircraft. With his bare hands he extinguished the flames still burning on their bodies. The second H-3 evacuated the survivors of the first H-3 but was unable to rescue personnel in the downed UH-1.

The source for this information was ARRS History

---

Tail No.:                    Model: HH-3E                    Date of Loss: 25May 70                    Unit: 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS,  
Country of Loss: SVN                    Call Sign:

PJ: Luther E. Davis (10W-96)

Notes:

---

Tail No.: 68-8283    Model: HH-53C    Date of Loss: 30 Jun 70    Unit: 40th ARRS  
Country of Loss: Laos    Call Sign: Jolly Green 54

Pilot: Leroy C. Schaneberg (09W-17)  
Co-Pilot: John W. Goeglein (09W-104)  
Flight Engineer: Marvin E. Bell (09W-102)  
P.J.: Paul L. Jenkins (09W-105)  
P.J.: Michael F. Dean (09W-103)

Notes: hit by ground fire during SAR for NAIL 44 (OV-10A), crash site excavated Dec 93, remains identified as a group 7 March 1995.

Additional Notes: From John Waresch, A-1 Pilot: *(ED: John Waresch remembers this as a Knife (21<sup>st</sup> SOS) helicopter that was shot down. It was actually a 40<sup>th</sup> ARRS HH-53C that was lost with all hands.)*

---

Hi Jim: I was there in 70 and no, there are no pictures that I know of.

So, You were a Knife. I worked with you guys from time to time but not a whole lot as I remember. One of the saddest days of my tour was seeing one of your birds do a loop and slamming into the turf upright but descending at a hellish rate. She blew into a huge ball of flame. I was told eight guys were on board. The Knives lived right behind our hooch (602<sup>nd</sup>) and I knew some of them but not all.

I was Sandy 4 watching the SAR progress with an Army FAC as on scene commander. We protested but Buffalo Chip or whoever ran the show insisted he remain on scene commander because he was first on site. When he called in the Knife for a pickup we again protested but were told to shut up. Right after he went into a hover over the survivor (A Heavy Hook SOG guy riding in the back of an OV-10.) he took a big hit on the right side. I saw the huge flash and it wasn't small arms. He pulled off in a left climbing spiral. After completing a 360 climbing turn she pitched up and did a complete loop, descending at an ever increasing rate. She hit upright but going down like a freight train. She blew sky high, no chance for any survivors.

After that the powers that be ordered the Sandy's to take over and we prepped the area, brought in the number two Knife, picked up the survivor and RTBed to NKP.

Not a nice memory. John

*(ED: John Waresh remembers this as a Knife (21<sup>st</sup> SOS) helicopter that was shot down. It was actually a 40<sup>th</sup> ARRS HH-53 that was lost with all hands.)*

---

Tail No: 63-09681    Model: CH-3E    Date of Loss: 13 Aug 70    Unit: 21st SOS, 56th SOW  
Country of Loss: Thailand    Call Sign: Skycap 36

Pilot: Alan B. Cheeseman (8W-106)  
Co-Pilot: George D. Henry (8W-108)  
Flight Engineer: Terry D. Reams (8W-112)  
Gunner/Other: William L. Ripley (8W-109)

Notes: Hit by a 12.7mm round which blew up the hydraulic accumulators and knocked out both engines. They were on a training mission for a new pilot and instructor. Also delivering parts from NKP to Ubon. Crashed near Ubon Thailand.

Additional Notes:

(Added 12/20/07) There was one surviving crew member - a 21st SOS pilot named (Captain) Vic Genez. Vick was the copilot seat (left seat) when the helicopter was hit by ground fire (12.7 mm machine gun) and made the dramatic descent - on fire.

After they hit the ground, Vic knocked out the left side window and went out of the helicopter. He ran around the aircraft and saw one of the FEs - William Ripley - come running out through the sliding door on the right side. Sgt Ripley was on fire and Vic extinguished the flames with his hands. Sgt Ripley, unfortunately, died later of his burns. No one else got out of the aircraft. Vic Genez was med-evac'd immediately and was treated for burns, but survived. I heard that he was decorated for his efforts to save Sgt Ripley.

George Henry was, I believe, a brand new (in the 21st SOS) CH-53 pilot who was (as I was told) in the jump seat for an area familiarization flight while Cheeseman and Genez were in the pilot seats. They were both trying to build time in the CH-3. I believe Cheeseman, who had already past the date of his last required

mission, had an assignment to be an instructor at Sheppard. Henry was so new to the unit, I did not even know he had arrived, and had never even met him. The mission had another task - taking some parts or whatever to Ubon.

The aircraft, when hit, was flying south and was approximately 20 nautical miles north of Ubon Air Base at about 1000 feet.

This is what I knew about that event. I was not assigned to a mission that day and first heard about the whole thing back at the officer's hootch. What a bombshell. We were all very depressed for a long time after that.

Jerry Kibby, 21<sup>st</sup> SOS

---

Tail No.: 64-15484    Model: UH-1P    Date of Loss: 25 Sep 70    Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Quang Duc, SVN    Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: Jackie P. Heil (07W-89)  
Gunner: Gerald A. Cooper (07W-89)

Notes: The lead gunship in a flight of two on a combat mission hit trees while turning to avoid a mid-air collision with a VNAF CH-34 and subsequently caught fire after it came to rest, destroying the aircraft. The IP and one gunner were killed, the pilot and the other gunner were injured in the impact.

Additional Notes:

(Added 9/9/02) MSgt Cooper was a door gunner. I well remember that day, Friday Sept 25th. The Blackbird picked up the crews from Tuy Hoa in the early morning for Bam Me Thout. The rest of us later that day either drove to Cam Ran Bay in a convoy or flew on other flights as this was the move day for the 20th to Cam Ran. We got the news later in the day that Capt Heil and Cooper had been killed. An ARVN King Bee came out of the hole the wrong way as Heil flew over the ridge. My good friend Scott Schneck was a gunner on the other bird. He saw the rotor hit the trees and it went in hard. A pilot and gunner survived. I can't remember either name but I can see the gunner as clear as day. Capt Heil was one of the ones that flew up to Ban Me Thout that Friday. I don't remember much about Cooper except he was a newer gunner and from Detroit. Jackie Heil was a real gentleman and really good guy and pilot.

Brian R. McGregor  
Howell, MI  
Door Gunner, 20th SOS, Jan '70- Jan '71

---

Tail No: 66-13287    Model: CH-3E    Date of Loss: 24 Oct 70    Unit: 21st SOS, 56th SOW  
Country of Loss: Laos    Call Sign: Knife 33

Pilot: Craig B. Schiele (06W-19)  
Flight Engineer: Thomas E. Heideman (06W-19)

Notes: The helicopter was in a flight of two extracting indigenous personnel from a hill top LZ. The helicopter picked up 11 personnel and as the aircraft lifted off, it turned and fell into trees 200 meters from the LZ. A short time later, the other helicopter picked up 8 indigenous personnel who said the entire crew of the helicopter was dead; however, 20 minutes later, radio contact was made with the survivors and they, along with the body of the pilot were recovered.

---

Tail No.: 68-10931    Model: CH-53    Date of Loss: 1 Mar 71    Unit: 21st SOS, 56<sup>th</sup> SOW  
Country of Loss: Laos    Call Sign: Knife 34

Pilot: Milton H. Ramsey (04W-014)  
Co-Pilot: Albert Tijerina, Jr. (04W-15)

Notes: at Lima Site 20, crashed on landing, hit ground, spun right, rolled down hill, flipped, burst into flames. Two flight engineers survived.

---

Tail No.: 68-10366    Model: HH-53C    Date of Loss: 25 Nov 71    Unit: 37th ARRS  
Country of Loss: Gia Dinh, SVN    Call Sign: Jolly Green 70

Pilot: Robert B. Swenck (02W-72)  
Co-Pilot: John W. George (02W-72)  
P.J.: Thomas D. Prose (02W-72)  
P.J.: James R. Thomas (02W-72)

Notes: SAR mission, crashed Song Na River

---

Tail No.:    Model: UH-1N    Date of Loss: 04 Dec 71    Unit: 20<sup>th</sup> SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Gia Dinh, SVN    Call Sign: Green Hornet

Gunner: Thomas E. Fike (02W-84)

Notes: Tim Fike was the last Hornet lost. If I remember right it was in Dec 71. It was his last mission before rotating home (it was to be a milk run out of Saigon and back). His crew was shot down as they were returning to Saigon. The pilot thought that they had seen a rocket launcher set up in a rice paddy. The went in low level to check it out (flying a slick), and a bad guy popped up and racked the bottom of the chopper. Tim Fike was killed, the other gunner (King) was seriously wounded and at least one of the pilots was wounded in the leg. From "Jim" (Official Squadron History does not have this information in files – History ends Sept 1971)

---

Tail No.: 68-10359    Model: HH-53C    Date of Loss: 27 Mar 72    Unit: 40th ARRS  
Country of Loss: Cambodia    Call Sign: Jolly Green 61

Pilot: David E. Pannabecker (02W-120)  
Co-Pilot: Richard E. Dreher (02W-119)

Flight Engineer: James Manor (02W-120)  
P.J.: Raymond J. Crow, Jr. (02W-119)  
P.J.: Raymond A. Wagner (02W-120)

Notes: crashed from unknown causes

---

Tail No.: 68-10365    Model: HH-53C    Date of Loss: 6 Apr 72    Unit: 37th ARRS  
Country of Loss: Quang Tri, SVN    Call Sign: Jolly Green 67

Pilot: Peter H. Chapman, II (02W-130)  
Co-Pilot: John H. Call, III (02W-130)  
Flight Engineer: Roy D. Prater (02W-131)  
P.J.: Allen J. Avery (02W-130)  
P.J.: William R. Pearson (02W-132)  
Other: James Alley (Photographer) (02W-130)

Notes: SAR mission for BAT 21 (EB-66C), crash site excavated May 94, remains of crew buried in Nov. 1997.

**Additional Information: The Flight of Jolly Green 67**

Jolly Green 67 was an HH-53 long range rescue helicopter assigned to the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRS) at Da Nang Airbase, South Vietnam. It was downed by enemy ground fire on 6 April, 1972, while attempting to rescue two American airmen who had been shot down and were hiding behind enemy lines.

This was one of the key events in what would become the largest rescue operation of that war, the rescue of Bat 21. Bat 21 was an EB-66 electronic jamming and reconnaissance aircraft. On 2 April, it was hit and destroyed by a North Vietnamese surface to air missile as it and another EB-66, Bat 22, escorted three B-52s as they bombed advancing North Vietnamese units invading South Vietnam at the beginning of what has come to be known as the Easter Offensive.

Only one crewmember, Lt. Col. Icel Gene Hambleton was able to eject from his stricken aircraft. His personal call sign for the rescue operation was Bat 21 Bravo. Immediately, US Army helicopters tried to rescue Lt. Col. Hambleton. But the North Vietnamese guns drove them off and downed one - a UH1 Huey, call sign Blueghost 39. Three of its crewmembers were killed and one was captured. The captured soldier was released by the North Vietnamese a year later. The bodies of the other three were eventually recovered and buried in Arlington National cemetery in April, 1994.

The next day, Jolly Greens from the 37th ARRS made two attempts to pick up Bat 21 Bravo. Both times, they were driven off with heavy damage to their aircraft. Additionally, an OV-10, call sign Nail 38, was hit and downed by an enemy missile. Its pilot Capt. Bill Henderson, was captured. Its navigator, 1Lt Mark Clark, call sign Nail 38 Bravo, was able to hide and await rescue like Lt. Col. Hambleton.

For two more days, rescue forces fought the weather and the enemy forces to try to rescue the two airmen. They could not get in. Instead, hundreds of air strikes were put in to beat down the enemy gunners.

---

But the 6th of April, dawned bright and clear. So, after 42 more air strikes were put in, a rescue force of four HH-53s and six escorting A-1 Sandy aircraft launched to make another attempt to recover the two evading Americans. They were assisted by several forward air controllers in O-2s and OV-10s and numerous other support aircraft.

Jolly Green 67 was designated to make the rescue attempt. But as it came to a hover over Bat 21 Bravo, it was raked by heavy enemy fire. The escorting Sandy A-1s tried to engage the enemy guns. But they could not get them all.

And they could see what the ground fire was doing to the helicopter. So several shouted for the crew to fly out of the area. The crew of Jolly Green 67 aborted the rescue attempt and tried to maneuver their stricken aircraft to safety. But the enemy fire continued and so damaged the craft that it crashed in a huge fireball a few kilometers south of the survivors. The fire was intense and lasted several days. There were never any indications of survivors.

The Sandy pilots were shocked by the turn of events. The other helicopters were ready to move into the area and make another attempt. But Sandy 01, the leader of the taskforce was not willing to risk another aircraft. He aborted the mission. It was just too dangerous.

The next day, another OV-10 supporting the rescue, call sign Covey 282, was shot down in the same area. The pilot, 1Lt Bruce Walker, call sign Covey 282 Alpha, was on the ground and evading like the two earlier airmen. His crewman, US Marine 1Lt Larry Potts, was never heard from. With this news, General Abrams, the overall US commander in Saigon directed that there would be no more helicopter rescue efforts for the now three downed flyers. Instead, a ground team was formed to attempt to infiltrate through enemy lines and pick them up. It was planned and directed by US Marine Lt. Col. Andy Anderson, and lead by US Navy SEAL LT Tom Norris. From 10 through 12 April, the team operated through enemy lines and rescued 1Lt Clark and Lt. Col. Hambleton. They also intended to rescue 1Lt Walker. But on the 18th, he was discovered by Viet Cong troops and killed. The rescues were over. Later, Lt. Tom Norris would get the Medal of Honor for the mission.

This was the largest sustained rescue operation of the war. Over 800 air strikes, to include B-52s, were put in in direct support. Numerous helicopters, A-1s and forward air controller aircraft were shot down or damaged. A total of eleven men were killed. But it was all done in the best traditions of the rescue forces. Their motto was: That Others May Live. During the war, they rescued 3,883 downed American or allied airmen, sailors, marines and soldiers and made it possible for them to return home.

And finally, we welcome you home, Jolly Green, and salute you proudly for a job well done.

Darrel Whitcomb

Author - The Rescue of Bat 21

To be published, Spring, 1998 by the Naval Institute Press.

---

Tail No.: 68-10362    Model: HH-53C    Date of Loss: 14 Jun 73    Unit: 40th ARRS  
Country of Loss: Cambodia    Call Sign: Jolly Green 64

Pilot: Gilbert A. Rovito (01W-119)

Co-Pilot: Francis E. Meador (01W-118)

Flight Engineer: David V. McLeod, Jr. (01W-118)

Notes: Tail rotor lost, crashed into Tonle Sap

Additional Information:

I am Mike Sullivan. I was a pilot in the 21<sup>st</sup> SOS from Mar72 to Feb73. I knew "Rocky" Rovito. We trained at Hill AFB together enroute to NKP. He is the pilot lost on 14 Jun 73 in Cambodia. Even though I had already DEROS'd, all rotorheads, of course, pick up on the scuttlebutt. We heard that Rocky's bird (Jolly 64) had a hydraulic hard-over, pitched up and naturally went gunneybag with no time to do squat. The PJ's happened to be sitting on the aft ramp with chutes on and were able to jump clear. No particular reason to disbelieve this and could have caused an ensuing tail rotor or boom failure or severance. History of 40th ARRS should have PJ's documentation somewhere.

During my whole tour, neither the 40th nor the 21st lost anyone. We did have a few encounters that were detrimental to our airframes though. The 40th I'm not sure of airframe disposition but the 21st had to leave two in the field in (I think) Aug 72. One was lost on an old French airstrip in Laos west of the Bolovens. The second (a wingman) finally lost flight controls due to damage at the same airstrip on its way back to NKP. It crashed in a sparse jungle area 30 kms south of NKP. The rotors of a 53 will cut 10 to 12 inch diameter trees no doubt about it. In Dec 72 one of our birds took what appeared to be a 27mm round (or something larger than 20mm) in one of its fuel sponsons. Fortunately, it had foam in it and the round was not a tracer. Numerous small arms hits were recorded but no Golden Beebees got to us.

Michael K. Sullivan (then Capt. USAF)

---

Tail No.: 70-1628    Model: CH-53C    Date of Loss: 24 Jan 75    Unit: 21st SOS, 56<sup>th</sup> SOW  
Country of Loss: Thailand    Call Sign: Dusty ??

Pilot: Gary C. Hall (01W-121)  
Co-Pilot: Bryan A. Rye (01W-121)  
Flight Engineer: James K. Hurley (01W-122)  
56<sup>th</sup> CAMS: Garry W. Hermanson (01W-121)

Notes: This loss occurred due to a rotorhead failure while on a routine FCF (Flight Control Flight) after maintenance work had been completed. Loss occurred near Ban Nakhon, Thailand.

Additional Information:

From David (Dave) Wharton, 56<sup>th</sup> CAMS, Jet Engine Shop:

This is how I remember 1-23 and 1-24-75. I have been blessed with excellent long term memory. It amazes me.

At about 11pm on 1-23 Jim Werder and I started a fuel control/throttle rigging job. The control removal and replacement went well, but we had hell rigging the throttles. Jim was so pissed off he kicked all of his tools

and bag off the right engine (looking from the front of the Jolly) area and I came out of the cockpit area to see his tools spread out on the PSP. I signed off our work in the log book and was sure our work was complete and done to our satisfaction. We finished about 0330 on 1-24. The crew did not come out before our shift finished at 0700 for the engine run and check. Jim and I did not know that the Jolly was going up for a complete Flight check on 1-24.

Jim and I came in at 7pm for our night shift on 1-24 and as we entered the north end of our 56CAMS jet engine shop, our flight line boss – Lupe Cardena – told Jim and I that the CH53 was missing. Our hearts sank and we both had a few tears from this shocking information. To this day, Jim, I remember that moment like it was yesterday. Lupe suggested that Jim and I lay low and await the news.

Jim and I took our dispatch truck with our co-workers and went about with our night's engine jobs. Jim and I watched an HH53 from I believe the 40th ARRS lift off from its parking place on the line. We discussed our work on the fuel control and the rigging from the night before and were 100% sure our work was well done, but we still were worried. The Jollys always took off on the main runway so we knew it was the rescue chopper.

At about dark the HH came back and we watched body bags being removed from the Jolly. Neither of us spoke for awhile. Then Jim exploded and told me that we should get in an OV10 (we had engine run and taxiing qualifications) and fire the M60 and rockets somewhere over Laos. I calmed him down and we both wept as we knew our buddy Garry Hermanson was on our CH53. Lupe had told us this before we went out on the flight line. Jim and I regained our composure and went about the night's engine work, but it was a very sad night.

We got off at 7am 1-25 and I remembering heading downtown NKP to crash at my bungalow by myself and not sleeping wink. Jim went to his teerak's place and did not sleep either. Went into work at 7pm and heard all kinds of rumors. The CH-53 crashed due to auto gyro problems (which I believed) – it was located upside down deep in a rice paddy – was brought down by enemy fire over Thailand – enemy fire over Laos. About 3 days later we heard the engines were taken to NKP town and parts were missing. Crazy rumors. I have the small article from the Houston Post that my Dad saved for me. It says the crash was due to a mechanical failure.

Jim, I never knew till I read your account that it was a rotorhead failure. Another engine buddy of mine (Clarence Jolley) who I keep in touch with has told me it was shot down over Thailand. I also keep in touch with Jim Werder. Both reside in Arizona. As the days went by we were told Jim and my engine work was checked out and all was ok. But I believe this but have no proof except word of mouth from Jan 75. I agree that our work was not the cause of the crash, but would really like to know what really happened. To be able to contact the rescue HH53 crew would be very rewarding to me to find out what they discovered when they found our CH53. But I think I will go to my grave and not really know the why and how and what of the crash. I will accept the fact that it was a rotorhead failure. I don't dwell on the crash as there is no future in the past.

But I do think about our CH53 every time I hear a chopper's rotor blades.

Dave Wharton (*ED: Dave Wharton was placed in contact with those who have first hand knowledge of the report of the tear-down and examination of the rotorhead.*)

Tail No.: 68-10933    Model: CH-53    Date of Loss: 14 May 75    Unit: 21st SOS, 56<sup>th</sup> SOW  
Country of Loss: Thailand    Call Sign: Knife 13

Pilot: James G. Kays (01W-127)  
Co-Pilot: Laurence E. Froehlich (01W-126)  
Flight Engineer: Robert P. Weldon (01W-129)  
Flight Engineer: George E. McMullen (01W-126)  
Crew Chief: Paul J. Raber (01W-128)

Notes: The helicopter departed launched from Nakhon Phanom airfield at 2030 on 13 May 1975 with a crew of five and 18 USAF Security Police onboard to assist in the recovery operation for the USS Mayaguez. The helicopter disappeared from the airfield's departure radar 40 miles west of the airfield. All onboard were killed. The helicopter had suffered a main rotor blade separation in flight.

---

Tail No.: 68-10925    Model: CH-53    Date of Loss: 15 May 75    Unit: 21st SOS, 56<sup>th</sup> SOW  
Country of Loss: Cambodia    Call Sign: Knife 31

Co-Pilot: Richard Vandeger (01W-135)

Notes: Assault on Koh Tang Island. The aircraft with 20 Marines and 2 Navy medics on board was hit by ground fire as it approached the Eastern Beach of Koh Tang Island. The pilot attempted to pull back to deeper water, but a direct hit to the cockpit brought the aircraft down in waste deep water, near the surf line, where it burst into flames. Thirteen onboard the helicopter survived the crash and swam out to sea where they were rescued, the copilot and 12 of the passengers were not recovered.

Additional Notes: 21 SOS was a US Air Force unit  
40 ARRS was a US Air Force unit  
4 MARINES was a US Marine Corps unit  
9 MARINES was a US Marine Corps unit  
Operation MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT  
Cambodia

Location, Koh Tang Island

Description: Shortly after dawn, a trawler with the Mayaguez crew and gunboat escorts sailed for Kompong Som, a mainland port. In spite of an impressive fire-power demonstration by USAF F-4's and a AC-130 which sank three boats and fired within ten yards of the trawler, the trawler made it to Kompong Som. Near midday the US forces received orders to prevent any gunboats from approaching either Koh Tang or the Mayaguez, so the tactical aircraft continued to attack and kill Cambodian gunboats. It was during this period that the SS Hirado, a Swedish ship, was fired upon by a Cambodian gunboat about 50 miles SW of Koh Tang but nothing more developed from this incident. At 0505, USAF C-141s landed the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Marines at Utapao. The leadership was briefed and then began their wait as the launch time was moved from 0910 several times during the day. Since nautical twilight would be at 1915, they had to launch by 1415. During this period they rehearsed scenarios for helicopter landings at two points on the Mayaguez. At 2200 the plan to helicopter assault the Mayaguez was abandoned.

---

Instead three 53s would take a smaller force to the USS Holt. At 0615, USAF C-141s and C-5As began lifting Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/9 from Kadena to Utapao. By late afternoon, the BLT was encamped at Utapao. Several BLT officers took off in a borrowed U.S. Army twin-engine aircraft for a reconnaissance flight over Koh Tang. By 2130 their assault plan was completed. It called for G/2/9 to make the initial assault from eight USAF 53s. The helicopters would return in about four and one-half hours with the second wave from E/2/9. The USAF had two long range helicopter units still in SEA. The 40<sup>th</sup> ARRS had HH-53s that could carry 20 to 27 Marines on the 270 mile flight from Utapao to the Mayaguez. These Jolly Green Giants were constructed for SAR operations, were equipped with three 7.62mm miniguns, had 4,000 pounds of armor plate, and aerial refueling capability. The 21st SOS flew CH-53Cs equipped with external fuel tanks for extended range. During the night of the 14th, the USAF continued its battle with gunboats around Koh Tang and the first surface units of the U.S. Seventh Fleet entered the Gulf of Siam. This force included the destroyer escort USS Harold E. Holt, the guided-missile destroyer USS Henry B. Wilson, and the attack carrier USS Coral Sea. All were coming from different points and arrived separately. Late on the 14th, the Holt was told that a detachment of Marines, some Military Sealift Command (MSC) civilian personnel to crew the Mayaguez, some Navy personnel and an USAF EOD team for booby traps were to be flown out to them and that they would serve as the boarding party. They were also to prevent the Mayaguez from reaching the mainland if she got underway.

The source for this information was The Marines in Vietnam Anthology P:240+

Continuing: Shortly after dawn on the 15th, a coordinated attack to secure Koh Tang and the Mayaguez commenced. Concurrently, air strikes from the USS Coral Sea began on the mainland harbor facilities and airbase that could be used to oppose the American operations. At 0400, three USAF HH-53s launched from Utapao and at 0600 offloaded 59 Marines, six MSC plus the EOD team on the Holt. The Holt's helicopter pad was too small for the 53 which could only set down one set of wheels. The debarkation was through a doorway and took several minutes. With the boarding party in place, the Holt immediately started for the Mayaguez which was 15 miles away. The plan included having Air Force A-7s air-drop tear gas just before the Holt came along side the Mayaguez. Wearing gas masks, the Marines embarked on the Mayaguez and the sailors passed mooring lines to the Marines. The well-organized search was completed in an hour and the deserted Mayaguez was secured. Since the Mayaguez's engines were completely cold, the Holt assisted with the MSC crew prepared and towed the Mayaguez. The two ships were about 3,000 yards off Koh Tang, well within range of heavy weapons.

Also at 0400, the initial assault wave of eight 53s launched from Utapao. At 0607 the assault commenced with simultaneous insertions at two LZs. The eastern LZ was on the cove side where the Cambodian compound was located. The western LZ was a narrow spit of beach about 500 feet behind the compound on the other side of the island. The Marines hoped to surround the compound. There were no pre-assault air strikes for fear of injuring any of the crew thought to be on the island. Six 53s were assigned to the eastern LZ. The accounts suggest there would be three waves of two ships. The sequence of events described next may not be correct. 1LT John Shramm's helicopter tore apart and crashed into the surf after the rotor system was hit by hostile fire. All aboard made a dash for nearby rocks and trees on the beach. As MAJ Howard Corson and 2LT Richard VandeGeer's helicopter approached the island, it was caught in a cross fire and hit by a rocket. The severely damaged helicopter crashed into the sea just off the coast of the island and exploded. To avoid enemy fire, survivors were forced to swim out to sea for rescue. At this point, the remaining waves were told to use the western LZ. The Wilson arrived off Koh Tang at 0700 from a different direction than where the Holt was. They slowed to 5 knots, watched the air strikes going in and could see the plumes of oily black smoke rising from the

two downed 53s in the cove. As they moved to within 1,000 yards of the island, lookouts shouted there were people in the water. Soon they located three groups of men still within AW fire range from the island.

Twelve from MAJ Corson's helicopter were rescued; thirteen, including the pilot, 2LT VandeGeer, were missing. Sporadic fire was taken by the first two 53s in the western LZ. Another inserted part of its load after repeated aborted approaches and two more could not even get in because of the rapidly increasing intensity of SA and mortar fire into the zone. SSGT Rumbaugh's aircraft was shot down near the coastline. Rumbaugh is the only missing man from this aircraft. The helicopter carrying the command and fire support group made it into an alternate LZ. One last attempt to insert a troop transport was not successful. At this point, all the forces going ashore for the next five-and-a-half hours were on the ground. Three helicopters had been lost. Two had been shot up so badly that they would make emergency landings far from Utapao with their troops still aboard. Three more returned to Thailand or assumed SAR duties after discharging all or part of their troops. About two hours after the assault began, a P-3 picked up a small target exiting Kompong Som harbor. Visual identification determined the Mayaguez crew was on this Thai fishing boat waving white flags. The Wilson retrieved the crew from the Thai boat and joined the Holt towing the Mayaguez. Within a few hours the Mayaguez was underway with her own crew under her own power.

First the Wilson and then Holt returned to Koh Tang to help with the extraction. They needed more helicopter landing platforms and more fire support. It would be late in the evening before helicopters retrieved the boarding party from the Mayaguez. Details concerning the second assault wave are sketchy but it did go in. The Marines were able to consolidate their positions. Save for one KIA, not enough water or ammo, and rather steady sniper fire, the ground force was OK. The Marines, Navy, or Air Force had no grid maps of this area. The airborne tactical air control center, the force on the ground, and the Wilson's guns had to work out how to bring supporting fires to the targets. The Cambodians were aggressive and even fired on the Wilson from the island and from a former USN Swift boat! The Wilson armed its gig and put it nearer the island for fire support and immediate rescue missions. A C-130 dropped a 15,000 lb. 'daisy-cutter.' With the Wilson's five-inch guns providing cover, the helicopter operations resumed. At last light, the extraction began.

The ground commander described the events as follows: 'As he (the first 53) settled into the shallow water at the edge of the beach he was greeted by an almost unbelievable hail of SA and AW fire from the ridge to our south and east. Tracers streamed into the perimeter and bounced around like flaming popcorn. The pilot set his aircraft down and took his share of the fire without flinching. As he lifted off, the next aircraft, whose reception by the Khmer Rouge was just as warm, moved into the zone. The troops on the perimeter zeroed in on the source of fire. The minigunmen on the helicopters poured streams of fire over the heads of the Marines and into the ridgeline. Enemy pressure remained strong right up until the last helicopter pulled out. At approximately 2030, the last helicopter recovered to the Coral Sea.'

The ground force had been delivered to all three ships. Sadly there were three USMC MIAs from a machine-gun position on the perimeter. The entire Marine phase of the operation lasted some 56 hours, but the last 14 were the longest! This Mayaguez incident narrative was written mostly from USMC and USN sources. What the VHPA desperately needs is better USAF information. The brief ARS material we have suggests the 40th ARRS was the primary player in the show, that they sustained two WIAs but no KIAs and that their aircraft had battle damage but no losses were mentioned. Other sources indicate that the two USAF KIAs were from the 21st SOS. Please contact the VHPA Records Committee if you can provide any more information.

The source for this information was *The Marines in Vietnam Anthology* P:240+

---

Tail No.: 68-10926    Model CH-53    Date of Loss: 15 May 75    Unit: 21st SOS, 56<sup>th</sup> SOW  
 Country of Loss: Cambodia    Call Sign: Knife 21

Flight Engineer: Elwood E. Rumbaugh (01W-135)

Notes: Assault on Koh Tang Island. While off-loading Marines on the Western Beach of Koh Tang Island, the helicopter was hit by ground fire. The pilot managed a single engine takeoff and headed out to sea, skipping along the water, and taking on water each time it hit the surface. The aircraft made it nearly a mile off shore when it crashed. The aircraft rolled on it left side and all of the crew managed to exit the aircraft; however, SSgt Rumbaugh disappeared a short time later and it is believed he drowned.

Additional Notes: See Above

### Losses By Rank:

ARRS	SOS	ARRS	SOS
E-1 = 0	0	O-1 = 1	1
E-2 = 0	0	O-2 = 4	1
E-3 = 5	0	O-3 = 12	18
E-4 = 9	7	O-4 = 6	4
E-5 = 11	7	O-5 = 1	1
E-6 = 5	3	O-6 = 2	0
E-7 = 3	2	TOTAL 26	25
E-8 = 1	0		
E-9 = 1	0		
TOTAL 35	19		

### Losses By Year

ARRS	SOS
1965 = 2	0
1966 = 4	0
1967 = 8	1
1968 = 14	6
1969 = 2	12
1970 = 13	13
1971 = 4	2
1972 = 11	0
1973 = 3	0
1974 = 0	0
1975 = 0	11

Combined ARRS All Ranks: 61  
 Special Operations All Ranks: 45  
 Total All Ranks: 106