

23Dec56 WB-50 SAR

Johnson Air Base, Japan. At approximately 2000 hours, a WB-50 from Yokota Air Base, crashes into very rugged and steep mountains about twenty miles northwest of Johnson Air Base. The night is moonless, and the fire from the crash can be seen from Johnson's flight line. The 36th ARS immediately dispatches an SA-16 with two paramedics, Technical Sergeant Terry Walker and Staff Sergeant George Hill aboard, and a helicopter with paramedic Technical Sergeant Robert Elliott. Both aircraft arrived at the crash site at about the same time.

On arrival in the area, the helicopter cannot find a suitable HLZ, and immediately pulls back to an orbit position. The SA-16 quickly moves in and rushes to finalize its pre-deployment checklist. Smoke from the fiery wreckage serves as a wind drift indicator.

Sergeants Walker and Hill jump. They are precariously perched on the steep incline; Hill is mere feet from a sheer drop-off. Voice checks are made and they race up the mountainside to the crash site. Upon arrival, they find only two survivors, both seriously burned and near death. Hill calls the helicopter on his URC-4 radio and orders an immediate evacuation.

With the two survivors' lives hanging in the balance, the helicopter crew do what others have done in life or death situations: they place their lives in extreme peril. Locating a small rice paddy--much too small "normally" to accommodate the helicopter--in a nook carved from the steep mountain wall, the crew edges the big bird forward until just the nose wheels are lightly resting on it. Whirling rotor blades are a mere handful of feet from smashing into the terrain. Precariously, it hovers until Walker and Hill are able to carry the nearly deceased airmen to it. The extraction is successful, and the men are saved. Only through the prompt action of all involved is the mission outcome so positive, and only through the courage and skill of the two paramedics and the helicopter pilot do they live. Sergeants Walker and Hill are awarded the Commendation Medal for their part in the mission; the helicopter pilot the Air Medal.