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DE RUMSAR 120 06/1138Z

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FM DET 3 PARCARESCUECEN TAN SON NHUT AFLD RMNN

TO RUEAHQ/HQ USAF WASHINGTON DC

RUECW/CNO WASH NGTON DC

RUHLHQ/CINCPAC CAMP HM SM TH HAWAII

RUEKDA/JCS WASH NGTON DC

RUHLKM/PACARESCUECEN HICKAM AFB HAWAII

RUHLKM/PACAF HICKAX AFB HAWAII

RUCQSH/AIR RESCUE SERVICE ORLANDO AFB FLA

RUCDAA/MATS SCOTT AFB ILL

RUMALC/THIRTEENTH AF CLARK AB PI

RUHLHL/CINCPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HAWAII

RUATZL/COMSEVENTHFLT

RUMFZAJ/CTG 77.4

RUMGZN/CTG 77.6

RUMFM/COMNAVPHIL

RUMSMA/MACV SAIGON RVN

BT

~~SECRET~~ DET 3/64-101-F. HQ USAF FOR AF-XOPH, PACAF FOR PFOCC-H, ARS FOR AJODC, MATS FOR MAOCO/AT, 13AF FOR JSARCC.

1. OPENING REPORT. MISSION NR DET 3 PARC-25-6 JUNE 64.

3. CONTROLLING AGENCY: DET 3 PARC. 4. SAR OBJECTIVE: PILOT OF USN

RF-8A C/S "CORK TIP 920. 5. LOCATION: 1923N 10327E. 6. ALERTING

AGENCY & DTG AJS NOTIFIED: USAF RADAR SITE "PANAMA" AT 06/1335H.

7. PERSONNEL INVOLVED: ONE USN. 8. WX IN AREA: REPORTED CLEAR BY

WINGMAN. 9. TYPE & TIME INITIAL SAR ACTION: CALLED UDORN THAILAND &

REQUESTED SAR & FIGHTER ACFT BE SCRAMBLED, 1343H. 10. FUTURE PLANS:

WILL ATTEMPT TO MONITOR NON US MILITARY

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EFFORTS. 11. ADDITIONAL INFO: AIR AMERICA SAR HELICOPTER

ATTEMPTED RECOVERY BUT DRIVEN OFF BY HOSTILE FORCES. CONTACT WAS

MADE WITH SURVIVOR VIA EMERGENCY RADIO BUT CONTACT LOST 1720H.

SURVIVOR SURROUNDED BY HOSTILE FORCES. PILOTS EJECTED FROM RF-8A,

REASON UNKNOWN. COMBINED RESCUE EFFORT, USAF, USN, AIR AMERICA.

PILOT OF HELICOPTER ATTEMPTING RECOVERY WOUNDED. RECOVERY ACFT

RECEIVING HITS BY GROUND FIRE. MSG FM CINCPAC DIRECTED RECALL

OF US AC AND PERSONNEL FROM SAR OPERATION. NON US RESOURCES IN LAOS

MUST BE USED. RECALL PASSED TO CONTROLLING AGENCIES APPROXIMATELY

1905H. FOR PARC, THIS IS MSG 176.N

GP-3.

BT

DOWNGRADED AT 12 YEAR
INTERVALS: NOT AUTOMATICALLY
DECLASSIFIED. DOD DIR 5200.10

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1. 30DC 640979

Ed ARS SC No.

64125



On 6 June 1964, two USN RF-8A's were reconitering Route 7 near the Plaine des Jarres, when the weather forced them to fly lower in the valley than normal. The aircraft of Lt. Charles Klusmann was hit by ground fire and he ejected. His wingman immediately reported his location on guard frequency and the message was relayed to the SARCC through the Panama GCI station near Da Nang. The SARCC requested that Air American dispatch helicopters to Lt. Klusmann's rescue. Meanwhile, an Air America C-123 and Caribou intercepted the mayday, dumped their cargoes, and flew to the scene. They spotted Lt. Klusmann on the ground and guided the two H-34's to the area. As the first helicopter positioned itself, intense ground fire erupted, a crew member was wounded, and both helicopters were forced to withdraw. ^{76/} At this point in time the rules of engagement did not permit RESCAP aircraft to be scrambled automatically. ^{77/} In fact, the political situation in Laos was so sensitive that Ambassador Unger had suggested that, since the YANKEE TEAM flights had served the purpose of indicating U.S. resolve to the communists, they be curtailed. ^{78/} However, the on-scene-commander in the Caribou requested fighter support and after some discussion T-28's were permitted to scramble from Vientiane. By the time they arrived, the weather precluded fixing the position of the enemy forces and their efforts were ineffective.

In the meantime, CINCPACAF approved the use of USAF aircraft in the RESCAP. Ambassador Unger concurred, and F-100's were scrambled from Takhli. The Navy also dispatched some fighters to the area.



[REDACTED]

Shortly thereafter, these measures were countermanded by CINCPAC, who further ordered that all U.S. forces be withdrawn from the SAR effort. This left the continued rescue effort entirely up to Air America and the RLAF. 79/

Air America continued the search until noon on 8 June without any promising indications. Lt. Klusmann had in fact been captured by the Pathet Lao after the first helicopter had been driven off, some three hours after his bailout. 80/

Even though the rescue attempt had almost been successful, the emergency had thrown everyone into confusion. Important decisions had to be made quickly and it was uncertain as to who had authority to make them. Communications were poor. One of the Air America pilots commented that he never knew what type of aircraft had gone down and he assumed that he was looking for an RLAF T-28. The Air America helicopters were not equipped with UHF or radio homing equipment. 81/

As a result of the action on 6 June, the reconnaissance flights on 7 June were escorted by F-8B's. The fighters very quickly got an opportunity to carry out their mission. Commander D. W. Lynn was hit on his second strafing pass over gun positions and was forced to eject. This caused a considerable amount of consternation since the Pathet Lao were then provided with tangible evidence that the U.S. role in Laos was not merely one of passive reconnaissance. 82/

unit also provided a readily available source of U.S. controlled aircraft to augment the tiny Royal Laotian Air Force. Although formally attached to the 2d Air Division in Saigon, in reality Detachment 6 was responsible to U.S. Ambassador Leonard Unger in Vientiane.⁷³

On March 16, 1964, all semblance of peace in Laos vanished as the Pathet Lao, with North Vietnamese backing, attacked across the Plain of Jars. Neutralist and Royal Laotian Government forces evaporated in the path of the enemy advance. In response, the United States resumed RF-101 reconnaissance flights on May 19 under the nickname "Yankee Team". U.S. Navy RF-8A and RA-3B reconnaissance planes from the Seventh Fleet in the Gulf of Tonkin joined in this effort with Air Force RF-101s from Detachment 1, 33rd Tactical Group based at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Republic of Vietnam.⁷⁴

Photo interpreters scrutinizing Yankee Team pictures found that the Plain of Jars was bristling with antiaircraft artillery with sixteen 37-mm and 57-mm antiaircraft sites on or around the plain. These guns, capable of firing 150 rounds per minute, were effective up to 4,500 and 15,000 feet respectively. Since most Yankee Team missions flew at minimum altitudes (below 1,500 feet), the 12.7-mm and 14.5-mm heavy machine guns, with an effective range of 1,800 and 3,000 feet and a high rate of fire, also presented a hazard.⁷⁵

Yankee Team missions made the presence of a professional search and rescue force even more important, since the capture of an American airman in Laos would have had an adverse international political effect. Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had approved sending Air Rescue Service helicopters to Vietnam, this force was not in place. Even stationed in Vietnam, the short-range HH-43s would have been of no use for rescue missions in northern Laos. Air America's limited search and rescue capability was considered inadequate to meet the potential danger. The Commander of 2d Air Division, Maj. Gen. Joseph H. Moore, recognized these limitations, and on May 29 moved to correct them by asking PACAF for permission to use Air Force aircraft for search and rescue in Laos.⁷⁶

During the first week in June, General Moore traveled to Udorn to confer with the Deputy Commander of 2d Air Division, Col. Jack Catlin. The subject was a search and rescue conference scheduled to begin on June 15. While visiting Udorn the rescue problem in northern Laos was vividly and tragically illustrated for General Moore.

A few minutes after noon on June 6, Eagle Green, a Royal Laotian Air Force T-28, picked up a mayday call from Corktip 920, a Navy RF-8A Yankee Team reconnaissance plane piloted by Lt. Charles Klusmann. Corktip 32 reported his wingman down south of the village of Ban Ban deep inside communist-controlled territory and only twenty miles from the North Vietnamese border.⁷⁷ An Air America C-123 cargo plane also heard the call for help and flew to the general area to assume the role of on-scene com-

mander. An Air America U-10 single-engine aircraft also joined the search, and within an hour they located the pilot. Three hours after the call for help went out, two Air America helicopters arrived at the crash scene, but as they approached to make the recovery, the entire area erupted in gunfire. The enemy had employed a tactic he would use often during the next ten years: the flak trap. While allowing the injured survivor to call for help, enemy gunners positioned themselves to wait for the arrival of the vulnerable helicopters. In this case both Air America choppers were hit and two men were critically wounded. The helicopters abandoned their efforts and headed for the nearest Lima Site (landing strip and base area in Laos).⁷⁸

It was evident to General Moore that the rescue forces faced heavy opposition. He contacted Gen. Jacob E. Smart, Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces, who authorized the use of Air Force aircraft and pilots in combat operations to rescue the downed Navy pilot. Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Robert Tyrrell, U.S. air attaché in Vientiane, dispatched four T-28s from Wattay Airport outside the capital. These Thai-piloted Laotian planes failed to find their target, so General Moore ordered three more T-28s, some with American pilots, from Wattay. It was too late. When these planes arrived over the crash site there was no sign of Klusmann who had been hauled off to captivity. With the weather deteriorating, General Moore ordered the search called off shortly before sunset.⁷⁹

The following day Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese gunners brought down a second Navy fighter. Old Nick 110, an F-8D piloted by Cdr. D.W. Lynn, was hit while escorting an RF-8A reconnaissance plane in the same area where Corktip 920 went down. Old Nick's wingman called the mayday at approximately two in the afternoon, reported that the commander's chute had opened, and passed coordinates to controllers at the Air Support Operations Center at Udorn. The controllers there passed the information to the Air Operations Center in Vientiane, and to Detachment 3, Pacific Air Rescue Center at Tan Son Nhut.⁸⁰ Air America H-34 Choctaws and Laotian-based T-28s responded in a rescue attempt that included an area search three miles either side of a point given as the downed pilot's location.⁸¹ However, Lynn's reported position was incorrect. Moreover, the search forces did not know that the Navy used a homing beacon transmitted on a different frequency from the one employed by the Air Force. Air America C-7 Caribous were equipped with compatible receivers and located the downed airman before darkness postponed the rescue. A low overcast covered northern Laos the next morning as the Air America Caribous flew back to the search area with their receivers open for a signal. When they picked up the signal, the downed pilot's exact location was pinpointed about forty miles south of the originally reported position. When Commander Lynn heard the drone of aircraft above the foggy mist, he fired a flare. An Air America H-34 helicopter dipped beneath the clouds and snatched the weary pilot to safety.⁸²