

31 March 65 F-100 SAR

Source = http://users.acninc.net/padipaul/PNL018_03_07/sea.htm

Thunder over MuGia Pass

NAME: Bigoness, Ronald A. Capt

DATE/STATUS: 31 March 1965 /Rescued

AIRCRAFT/UNIT: F-100D / 615 TFS/401 TFW DaNang AB,
RVN

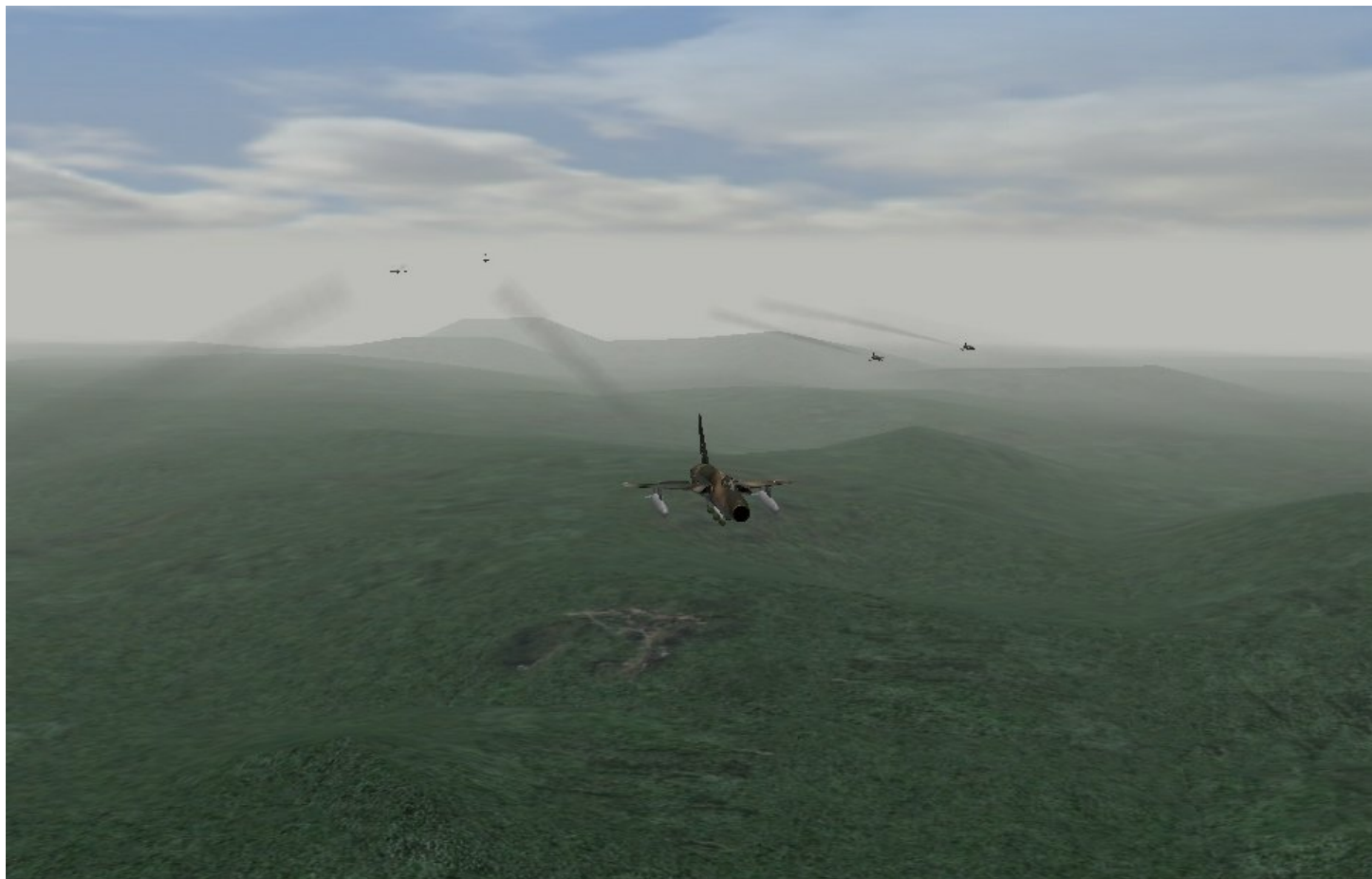
RESCUE AIRCRAFT: 2 **HH-43Bs** Call Signs Alban 21 & 41

ZONE LAND/COMBAT: 090*/65

Nakhon Phanom RTAFB

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following story was written with the cooperation of Ron Bigoness and Jay Strayer who were interviewed by phone on 14 Jan 2007*

On the second of March 1965, the USAF instituted its famous "ROLLING THUNDER" campaign, the systematic bombing of North Vietnam, starting at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Vietnam. The planes flew from bases in South Vietnam and Thailand. By slowly advancing the target areas northward across North Vietnam, President Johnson hoped the North Vietnamese leaders would eventually be convinced to sit down at the peace table.



On Wednesday 31 March 1965, Captain Ron Bigoness and his Wingman Capt. Lawrence “DUTCH” Holland were awakened at 04:30 by the Squadron Duty Officer. They were scheduled to depart **DaNang AB, RVN** and fly the early morning **Weather Reconnaissance** prior to the day’s **ROLLING THUNDER** bombing missions.

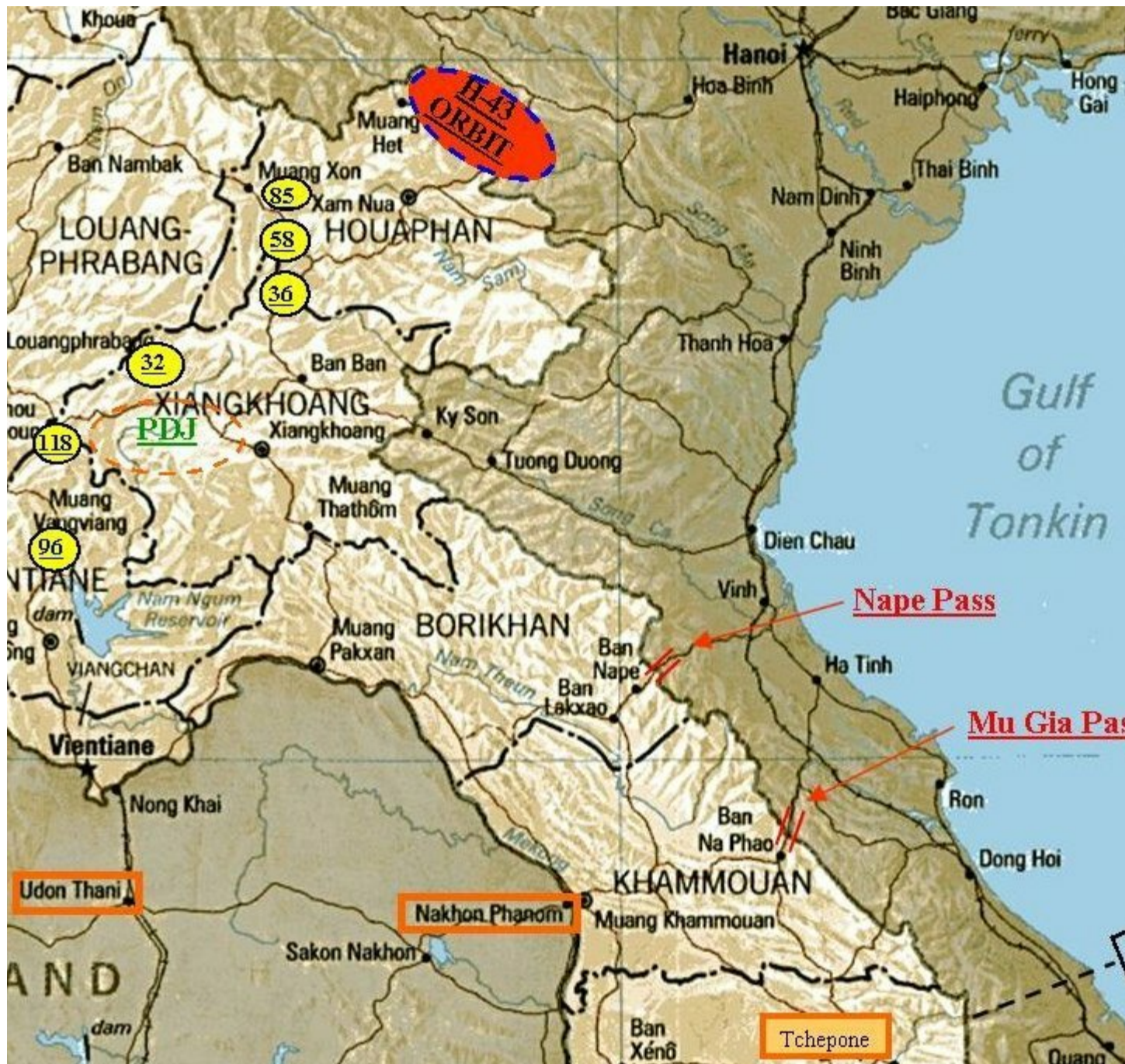
After breakfast at the **DaNang Officers Open Mess** aka “The **DOOM CLUB**”, it was time to plan the mission and preflight their aircraft for a 08:00 launch. The time went quickly and **PANTHER 01 & 02** were heading down **RW36** on their way NORTH.

Ron Bigoness; we headed into **North Vietnam** flying along the coast. The sky was about 8/10 overcast and as I passed each Waypoint, I would make a notation on my

Kneepad. Near **Vinh** I turned inland with the intention of following the railway south towards **MuGia Pass**.



Flying along the railway line, we came upon a Freight Train headed south and visions of P-47 Thunderbolts shooting up trains in the European Theater briefly flashed through my mind. Unfortunately I had orders to avoid any type of combat, so we pressed on to complete the mission.



At the junction of the Ha Tinh Road, we turned west following a railroad spur towards MuGia Pass. The clouds increased and were layered at different altitudes. I went under the lowest layer (aprox. 1500' AGL) as I crossed over the Pass.





Almost immediately, I felt a thump and heard a bang. I keyed my radio and said "Hey, DUTCH, I think I've been hit". He replied, "Ron, you're on **FIRE**, get out!"



I pulled up and started climbing. The bangs to my rear increased and as I looked out the cockpit, I could see PANTHER 02 off to the right and saw that my right wing was on **FIRE** as I entered the clouds.



I had previously decided that I would not be captured, so ejecting was not an option. The controls were sloppy, but since the trim continued to work and I was climbing on a southwesterly course. Minute by minute I was getting further away from those "BAD" people who were trying to shoot me down.

I keyed the mike again and told "DUTCH" to copy my Weather Observations so he could complete the Mission. I had just finished reciting my notes when the controls froze and with the engine still running, the aircraft nosed over. Down I went from 13,000 to 7,000, then

back up to 10,000. It was like riding a Roller coaster and all I could do was hang on.



As my **HUN** topped out at 10,000 feet and 450 knots, it rolled inverted and headed down. I was above my safe ejection speed but, with no other choice I pulled the "ejection handles". When the canopy separated, everything not secured swirled and was sucked from the

cockpit. Then my seat entered the [slipstream] and the wind yanked my right arm up, dislocating it.

After separating from the seat, I looked up to see my chute streaming; not a good sign. I was about to give up hope, when the chute snapped open blowing out two adjacent panels. Again, not normal, but I did slow down.

Floating down with my dislocated arm sticking straight out, my fear was that it would strike the trees adding to the injury. Amazingly, I went straight through one of the few holes in the lush green canopy and stopped, suspended about 8- 10 feet above the jungle floor. Using my left hand, I hit the harness release and fell. When my feet hit the ground, my legs collapsed and I fell gashing my face on a log lying on the jungle floor.

I regained my feet and took out my URT-21 Survival Radio. I could hear DUTCH circling, but could not contact him. One handed I fiddled with knobs, switches and dials, but still could not contact my Wingman.

Whether the radio was malfunctioning or it was my failure to tune it properly, I was unable to contact PANTHER 02 before he was Bingo Fuel and forced to depart for DaNang.

PANTHER 02, prior to departing the area made contact on Guard with the airborne HU-16 Rescue Command Aircraft and provided the location of **PANTHER 01's** chute.

Standing alone and listening to his Wingman's engine noise disappear in the distance, Ron Bigoness wondered how anyone would find him in this jungle.

Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base

"NKP "

Members of Detachment Provisional 2 Pacific Air Rescue Center (DetProv2 PARC) were up on a morning Training Flight when they overheard **PANTHER 02's** transmission to the HU-16. After relaying the information to *invert*, the **NKP** Radar Facility, they landed to install the *Range Extension Fuel System (**REFS**). The **REFS** consisted of 3-55gal Fuel barrels stacked in the rear cabin and plumbed to gravity feed JP-4 Jet Fuel through the cabin floor directly into the fuel tank.

***EDITOR'S Note:** From June 1964 when the first H-43Bs were deployed to **NKP**, the aircraft's mission range was seen as a problem. The H-43B had a mission radius of 75 nautical miles with 20 minutes on station and a small reserve. They were unable to reach the "Plain of Jars" much less the Northeast **Laos/ North Vietnam** Border. But; with the help of **AIR AMERICA**, fuel was cached at various "Lima

Sites” allowing the Huskies to land and refuel, then continue the mission. A suggestion from Capt. Fred Glover in early 1965 provided a method to extend the H-43’s internal fuel load. By adding 3-55gal barrels, flight time and range were almost doubled.

Although unapproved aircraft modifications were forbidden, Senior ARS Officers when confronted with this mission enhancement and realizing the need, would play “3 monkeys” while visiting the Detachments at **NKP** and **Udorn**. As in all wars, GI ingenuity would solve problems and save lives. Another quick fix was swapping the HH-43B One hundred and ten foot hoist cable reel for the HH-43F, 216 foot reel.



Quickly, two H-43s were equipped with REFS,
refueled and the Air Crews briefed.



On the **NKP** Ramp LtoR: unk, Capt. Jay Strayer, Capt. Fred Glover and Capt. James
Rodenberg

Alban 21(Low Bird)

(RCP) Capt Jay Strayer

(RCCP) Capt James Rodenberg

(CC/HM) A1C Cecil Boothby

(PJ) SSGt Ensom “EJ” Farmer

(PJ) SSGT Herbert Romish

Alban 41(High Bird)

(RCP) Capt Israel Freedman
(RCCP) Capt Warren Davis
(CC/HM) A3C Frank Hanutke
(PJ) SSGT Harold Stroud
(PJ) A2C Eric Anderson

Jay Strayer; We headed east at a fast pace. On reaching the area plotted on the map, a search pattern was established, but no locator beacon was heard or any other indication of a bailout observed. After a long and frustrating search effort, I rechecked my map and realized that I had mis-plotted the original coordinates. I called the airborne Hu-16 to confirm the coordinates and embarrassingly found we were more than 20 miles north of the bailout. I quickly re-plotted the coordinates and we headed south.

Ron Bigoness; I had been in the jungle for about two and one half hours when I thought that I heard a helicopter. I tried using my survival radio, but I still could not contact anyone. I managed to find one of my MK 13 Day/Night Flares and using my one good hand and my foot, I ignited the **smoke** end. For some reason, possibly the humidity, the **smoke** seemed to linger close to the jungle floor and not rise through the trees.

Jay Strayer; Arriving at the re-plotted location, we started another search pattern; again unsuccessful for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, I heard a weak and intermittent locator beeper signal, just strong enough for the ADF to home in on. We were nearing BINGO fuel when we spotted the MK 13 *smoke* lifting through the trees.



Alban21 hovers above *smoke* rising from the jungle

Ron Bigoness; The jungle had three layers, small shrubs 2-3 feet high on the jungle floor, a second layer of trees 25-30' high and the 3rd with trees at 100 plus feet. Through one small opening, I watched the helicopter move by slowly. As I looked up, I made eye contact with someone looking from the open rear of the H-43. I waved and to my relief, he waved back. The Huskie continued forward, but then it stopped. I started running towards the sound of the helicopter hovering and as I approached the area, I could see someone being lowered through the trees.



If you look hard, you can see:

(PJ) E.J. Farmer being lowered to assist the injured Ron Bigoness while Alban 21 hovers with its Bear Paws resting in the 100 foot tree tops

As I reached the spot where the lowered crewman stood, I was greeted with a shout, "**It's OK, we got you now Captain**". **Pararescueman**, SSGt E.J. Farmer examined my dislocated shoulder then said "I'm sorry, but I've got to put you in the "Horse Collar" and it's going to hurt.



Capt Ron Bigoness, still on the hoist is pulled into the cabin door

After all these years, I can't remember any pain, but I've been told that once in the helicopter cabin, I was screaming so loudly, that the pilot heard me over the engine noise and ordered (PJ) SSGt Herb Romish to give me something for the pain.



(PJ) E.J. Farmer is recovered from the jungle floor

Jay Strayer; with the rescue complete, we headed back to **NKP**, another "Satisfied Customer" on board. We were a little over halfway back when the "bright **RED**" Low Fuel Warning Light came on indicating the bird had only 20 minutes of flying time left. A quick calculation indicated we could make it back to the base, but just in case, we kept our eyes open for any clearing in the dense jungle below.



At **NaKhon Phanom RTAFB**; Ron, grimacing in pain is placed on a litter prior to going to the Dispensary

After being stabilized by the **NKP** Flight Surgeon, Ron was loaded into a HU-16 for a flight to Ubon RTAFB, where USAF Doctors treated his injuries.



Ron a few days later, arm still in a sling, but feeling much better

Editor's Note: Sadly, **Capt. Lawrence "Dutch" Holland** was killed in a shoot-out with the Viet Cong after being shot-down 9 weeks later on 12 June 1965. A Rescue Helicopter arrived just in time to watch the V.C. drag his body away.

Maj. Warren K. Davis (who took the rescue photos) was killed on 19 July 1969 as **Pedro 70** was blown from the sky by an exploding B-52 while searching for a missing crewmember. (["Ring of Fire- 10-06"](#))

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