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Detachment Provisional Second (PARC)
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
APO US Forces 96310

REPLY TO

ATTN OF: Det Prov Second

1 APR 1965

SUBJECT: Det 3 PARC Mission No. 283 31 Mar '65

TO: Headquarters Pacific Air Rescue Center

Classification (cancelled) (changed to UNCLASS-
effective on 14-3-19, under the authority of
GAS, by 14

INFO: Det 3 PARC

1. By coincidence, one of our HH-43's was flying a local training flight and heard the distressed pilot's initial "Mayday". The helicopter pilot relayed it to Invert at 1000 hours (all times approximate and local), and Invert, in turn, alerted the alert duty officer, myself. The fact that our aircraft are placed on alert each morning at 0900, put us in good position for immediate scramble, even though today's official alert did not begin until 1120.

2. I notified Det 3, PARC of the pilot's ejection at 1030 and relayed his approximate position (098° @ 58 miles) as given me by Invert. The alert crews in the meantime, had been alerted by the still airborne HH-43 and initiated final aircraft combat mission configuration, including the "Range Extension Fuel System" (REFS). Final readiness was confirmed at 1040 and takeoff was accomplished at 1050.

3. Takeoff, climb to 4000' MSL, and cruise progressed smoothly, and initial contact with Invert was established on frequency 278.4. We learned that F-100 Rescap aircraft and Basil 66, HU-16, were enroute to the scene. Soon after border penetration, we established contact with Air America's Victor Rescue Control aircraft. Changes of frequencies had proceeded from 278.4 through 321.0, 311.0, to 364.2 before satisfactory communication was established among all aircraft. Prior to reaching the target area, both helicopters jettisoned the 55 gallon drums, making up REFS. REFS procedures were considered routine and the system functioned as expected.

4. The target area was reached at 1150. A few signals from the survivor's DFR-21 were heard faintly, but neither Alban aircraft (HH-43's) could home on it. Some confusion existed at this time as to the exact location of the crash site, and we experienced a considerable amount of chatter over the SAR frequency as we tried getting within visual range of Basil and/or Victor Control aircraft.

5. At 1230, I (in Alban 21) sighted a small amount of smoke. I circled the area at 3500' MSL four or five times. I saw what I thought to be a signal mirror flashing. The area was made up of very dense jungle and no visual habitation was within 8 - 10 miles. I advised Alban 41 I was

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65-0637

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descending for investigation. (In the critique following the mission, it was felt that I should have perhaps requested that Rescap aircraft go down for the initial look. I certainly agree with this concept if time and conditions warrant.) The area was, in fact, the crashed aircraft and what I had seen flashing was the sun reflecting from scattered metal pieces. All of this time, both Alban helicopters were intermittently receiving weak signals from the survivor's URT-21 radio beacon. They would come and fade, but never get strong. The HU-16 could not pinpoint the location, and Victor Rescue had no ADF homing equipment. By turning until the signal got louder, we got closer to the survivor. Finally the signal became strong enough that our ADF could home on it. We passed over the survivor's chute approximately 1250 and one of my crew members spotted it. Alban 41, circling above us, called simultaneously that he had it spotted also. One of my crew dropped a smoke grenade to mark the area and the survivor released one about the same time.

6. The foliage was so thick, we could not see the survivor. The URT-21's signal was coming in exceptionally loud at this time. We have since conjectured that a combination of a weak battery and dense vegetation limited the signal intensity, thereby shortening its range.

7. Assuming the pilot was injured, I lowered a paramedic to him with the hoist. I hovered over a small opening about 50-100' from the parachute canopy. I estimate the trees to have been 100' tall, as it took all the hoist cable to reach the ground, even with the helicopter touching the tree foliage in places. As the paramedic reached the ground, the survivor walked up to him. Though he had a suspected broken arm, the survivor managed to hold himself in the sling safely enough to allow his exit through the surrounding foliage. The paramedic was subsequently hoisted aboard at 1300 and both Alban aircraft proceeded home.

8. The crew for the mission consisted of the following personnel:

Low A/C (Alban 21)

Captain Jay M. Strayer,
Captain James C. Rodenberg,
A1C Cecil A. Boothby,
SSgt Eason J. Farmer,
A1C Herbert H. Romisch,

High A/C (Alban 41)

Captain Israel Freedman,
Captain Warren K. Davis,
A3C Frank P. Hamutke, AF
SSgt Harold G. Stroud, A
A2C Eric A. Anderson Jr.,

Sorties flown 2, hours flown 6+00.

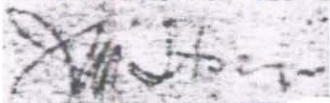
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9. In summary, the mission was carried through without any significant drawbacks. Two outstanding factors were responsible for our success:

a. The makeshift HH-43B supplementary fuel system (REPS), that allowed us an extra 35 minutes "stay" time. Considering the time it took to locate the survivor, the lack of REPS would have delayed his recovery by an unknown and perhaps crucial, length of time. Jettisoning of the REPS tank was a definite advantage in that it allowed much more cabin room for crew members and eliminated the danger of spilled fuel in case of a hit from ground fire.

b. The survivor's possession of an operating UHF-21 radio beacon. Without this device, it is quite conceivable the survivor might never have been located because of his injury and the surrounding high, dense foliage. The advantages of possessing a properly operating signal - supplemented by smoke flares, a strobe light and signal mirror - cannot be overstressed to crew members flying over hostile territory. There can be no doubt in anyone's mind that the success of this particular mission was the direct result of such an operating signal device.



JAY M. STRAYER
Capt, USAF
Rescue Crew Commander

Dear Jay,

Nov. 13, 1997

How nice to hear from you so quickly after our phone conversation. As Paul Harvey says on the radio, here's the rest of the story:

My squadron, the 615th of the 401st TFW out of England AFB, was the first TFS to operate in NVN and Laos. We were TDY to the PI in June 1964 when Alvarez, the USN pilot, was shot down in Laos. We flew a "retaliatory" strike in Laos near the Plain-Of-Jars after his shoot down. As you may recall, he was the very first POW.

We returned TDY to the Far East in Mar. 1965, this time to Danang. On Mar. 31, 1965 I was the flight leader on one of the very early "Rolling Thunder" missions over NVN. My mission that morning was to recce the weather for a strike scheduled for the afternoon. The target was Mu Gia pass on the border between NVN and Laos. It was also the beginning of the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the south.

As I entered Mu Gia pass I had to descend to 1,500' to get under a broken layer of clouds. Even though my wingman and I were weaving I was nailed in the aft section by automatic weapons fire. I told my wingman that I was hit and he replied "yeah you're on fire, you better get out". I told him "I ain't getting out here, this thing is still flying". I was able to get the nose up before the flight controls froze and the darn thing climbed to about 13,000'. I had trim control for a short while but soon all systems failed and all the red lights in the cockpit were flashing. My heading remained about 200 - 220 degrees. My right wing was on fire and I had small explosions in the aft section but that old engine kept churning. At 13,000' as the airspeed fell off, the nose dropped below the horizon as the bird was seeking to fly the trimmed up speed of about 400 kts. I was now just a passenger riding a roller coaster since all the controls and the throttle were frozen. As long as I was getting farther away from Mu Gia pass I was willing to go along for the ride.

As I descended through about 8,000', the speed and lift increased and the nose came up and the aircraft climbed to around 10,000' where once again the nose dropped as the airspeed dissipated. However, as my descent started this time the aircraft began to roll upside down. Either rolling or upside down I knew the nose would never come up above the horizon again. It was time to leave but the problem now was that the plane was above safe ejection speed and I had to eject at around 450 knots, nose down and upside down.

I blew the canopy and ejected. Immediately on hitting the slipstream my helmet was torn off along with my knee pad. Also my right arm was jerked out of it's socket. My chute deployed but streamed because of the high speed. I

thought that was the end when suddenly the chute popped open and two adjacent panels in the canopy blew out. I had a big hole in the canopy. My wingman helplessly circled as I descended into the vast green jungle below. My right arm, out of the socket, dangled uselessly and painfully at a ninety degree angle in front of my shoulder.

I was concerned about further injury to my arm and shoulder as I descended through the jungle canopy. Luckily my arm did not catch on any limbs as I passed through the branches but my chute hung up in the tree top leaving me suspended about ten feet above ground. I got out of my harness and dropped to the ground. I heard my wingman circling overhead but I could not see him through the thick jungle canopy overhead. My shoulder was very painful as I moved about. I tried to contact my wingman with my hand-held radio but it didn't work. I guess the batteries were dead. All our equipment was from our TDY kits and in the past was more for passing ORI's than actually functioning.

I guess it was around 9:30 or 10:00 AM and after my wingman departed I heard nothing except monkeys screaming. After about two hours I heard a chopper and my hopes soared. I tried to position myself in a spot where I could see through the few small holes in the canopy. At one brief moment in time I was looking up through a small break in the canopy and SSgt Farmer was looking out the clam shell doors at me. It must have been the proverbial needle in a haystack situation.

I waved and he waved back. He descended on the cable and I ran through the brush to him. His first words to me were "don't worry captain we've got you now". When he saw the condition of my arm and shoulder he said, "I'm sorry but all we have is the horse collar, I'll have to put it under your arm". I was not in a position to argue and I quickly allowed him to place the horse collar around me. From this point on you know how I arrived at NKP.

An SA-16 flew me to Ubon Thailand where U.S. Army doctors put my arm back in it's socket. The upper arm bone was fractured but we didn't know that at the time. The following day I was returned to my squadron at Danang where I remained for about a week before returning to the states. I spent the next five months at Wilford Hall in San Antonio going through rehabilitation. In Aug. 1965 I was discharged from the hospital and returned to flying status. In 1966 I went PCS to PACAF HQS. which I hated so I volunteered to complete my tour in VN. I returned to Nam in 1968 and flew 220 combat missions before being reassigned to USAFE HQS. which I also hated. I retired from the AF in Oct. 1974 and settled in Nacogdoches, Texas.

After retirement I attended graduate school at Stephen F. Austin State Univ. here in Nacogdoches and received my

MBA in Mgt. My Dept. Chair asked me to stay on as a faculty member in Mgt. I did for the next seventeen years retiring only last year from teaching.

I met and married my wife in Wiesbaden Germany. She was a USAF civilian employee. We returned to Selma, AL from Germany where my son Chris was born in 1973. My daughter Leslie was born in 1975 here in Nacogdoches. Both of my kids are Texas Aggies and both will graduate in Dec. this year. I am enclosing a photo of me and my family so you can see what you started.

I noticed in your letter that you had my position fixed at 65 miles from NKP. I thought I was closer than that but I was only guessing. Do you recall the TACAN location of where you actually picked me up?

I am keeping your letter to include in other stuff I have from that experience. I have already sent my kids a copy of your letter as I know they are very interested in what happened that day. Thanks again Jay, you really made my day thirty-two years ago.

Regards,

From: ronald bigoness <ronndnlagov@webtv.net>
To: Robert LaPointe <rlapointe@gci.net>
Date: Wednesday, August 25, 1999 1:54 PM
Subject: Re: SEA SAR

Dear Bob,

I have often wondered whether I was the first guy ever pulled out by SAR. I know I wasn't the first shot down, I just never heard of anyone being rescued before me.

I was the flight leader of a flight of two F-100's out of Danang on Mar. 31, 1965. Our squadron was the 615th Tactical Fighter Squadron TDY from England AFB, LA.

My mission was a weather recce for one of the early Rolling Thunder strikes scheduled later that day. My airplane was hit by automatic weapons in Mu Ghia Pass between North Viet Nam and Laos. I ejected over Laos after flying my burning aircraft for about six or seven minutes.

My right shoulder was dislocated during the high speed ejection.

I guess John Farmer gave you the rest of the story. Feel free to contact me if you need more info.

Ron Bigoness

From: Robert LaPointe <rlapointe@compuserve.com>
 To: LaPointe, Robert <rlapointe@gci.net>
 Date: Sunday, August 22, 1999 10:55 PM
 Subject: Your Inquiry

-----Forwarded Message-----

From: "Jay Strayer", INTERNET:mrslick@in-touch.net
 To: , rlapointe

Date: 08/22/1999 5:37 AM

RE: Your Inquiry

1.. I just read PJ Farmer's note re your manuscript and 1964 at NKP -- as I recall, Det Provisional TWO (maybe ONE?) was first in place a couple of months before my arrival in Jan 65 -- all lived downtown NKP -- we took occupanccy of the first built hootches when we replaced the TDY folks who first established the det (er were also TDY) -- one of the '64 group, (then) Captain Jim Sovell stayed over a week to orient us since none of us had any SEA experience -- I remain in contact with Sovell (no e-mail address) so if you would like his snail-mail address I shall forward -- when you run out of 1964 stuff to write, I shall try helping with year 1965 effort -- by the way, attached is me flying over Mu Gia pass where we pulled out an F-100 pilot -- that's (then) SSgt Farmer on the "string" on his way down (or up, don't remember which) -- he helped the injured pilot into the sling BP (before penetrators) -- Cheers --

Colonel Jay Strayer, Ret
 E-mail Address(es):
MrSlick@in-touch.net

----- Internet Header -----

Sender: mrslick@in-touch.net
 Received: from mail.in-touch.net ([207.40.10.8])
 by spamgaab.compuserve.com (8.9.3/8.9.3/SUN-1.3) with ESMTP id JAA01004
 for <rlapointe@compuserve.com>; Sun, 22 Aug 1999 09:36:55 -0400 (EDT)
 Received: from default ([207.40.10.29] (may be forged))
 by mail.in-touch.net (2.5 Build 2640 (Berkeley 8.8.6)/8.8.4) with SMTP
 id JAA03936 for <rlapointe@compuserve.com>; Sun, 22 Aug 1999 09:35:21 -0400
 Reply-To: "Jay Strayer" <mrslick@in-touch.net>

08/22/1999

From: Robert LaPointe <rlapointe@gci.net>
To: Strayer, Jay <mrslick@in-touch.net>
Date: Monday, August 23, 1999 11:20 AM
Subject: Circa 1964 Rescue History

Thank you for contacting me. If you are not familiar with my project visit my web site at <http://home.gci.net/~rlapointe>

Accuracy is one of my primary concerns. I spent two weeks at the Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) and collected a large amount of primary source material. However there was not much information on SAR's completed in 1964. According to message traffic Air America did the majority of SAR's until early 1965.

Are you aware of any SAR's accomplished in 1964? Who, when, where details are solicited if you have any information.

Is the photo you sent of the SAR in Mu Gia Pass the one in which Ron Bigoness was rescued? What was the date of that mission?

I am wrapping up the draft copy of rescue in 1964. I would be interested in your comments on it. Would you be interested in reviewing it? I would send it, minus photo's, via internet. I have not had a chance to copyright the material yet so I would request that you not release it to anyone else.

Could I have permission to use the photo you sent in my book and on the web site?

Again, thanks for your interest in my project.

Bob LaPointe

From: Robert LaPointe <rlapointe@gci.net>
To: ronald bigoness <ronndnlagov@webtv.net>
Date: Thursday, August 26, 1999 9:26 AM
Subject: Re: SEA SAR

I am now able to confirm a SAR in NVN on 2 Mar 65. While your SAR was not the very first it is one of the earliest missions and will be included in my book. How long were you on the ground? What was your callsign? Did your survival gear work as advertised? From your perspective how did the SAR go?

Till later

Bob

-----Original Message-----

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From: Jay Strayer <mrslick@in-touch.net>
 To: Robert LaPointe <rlapointe@gcl.net>
 Date: Friday, August 27, 1999 7:55 AM
 Subject: Re: SEA SAR

I don't know about the Thailand mission, but I do know about the one in Laos as it came from our outfit at NKP in early March -- after a long lull, NVN bombing began anew in early March 65 -- we were bored after being at NKP since 2 or 3 Jan -- all of us came from separate USA dets and did not know each other till then -- we teamed into pairs, hard crews if you will, and began putting together some combat rescue flying rules since we had no training at all of same -- we had heard of formation flying and quickly decided we should always fly in pairs as the fighter guys did -- not sure we were the first, but we called the lead bird the low bird and the second the high bird -- the DETCO was Capt Warren Davis who commanded only because he was the ranking officer -- we moved into the first hooches built -- NKP was primarily a radar site and commanded by Major (first name not remembered) diamond -- knowing our priorities, we promptly designated the first hootch the officers club, the second the rescue det officers' living quarters (6 of us) and the third the fire dept in which those members lived -- because we were bored and none of us had "seen the world", it occurred to us it was a good idea to travel around the country -- we did fly the flight surgeon and a dental tech into surrounding Thai villages to help with medical problems -- I recall we did this on our own initiative -- we also drew straws to see in what turn we could take the twice weekly C-123 courier to to visit Bangkok on the pretense of having one of the HH-43s battery's checked over -- not all that much of a pretense for we had no aux power units for engine start, only the battery -- I drew the number one slot for such a visit and unknown to me, air attacks on the North were under way as the C-123 I was aboard was taking off for Bangkok, thus I missed all the activity that day -- Rescue rules were such we could not fly the HH-43 without a copilot so the det was a pilot short because of my absence -- Capt Fred Glover and 1Lt McCutchen were directed to fly to Ubon AB and stand alert so that left only one HH-43 at NKP -- later that nite, the det was ordered into Laos to rescue a downed USAF pilot and in so doing made the first nite rescue of that campaign -- after a quick test hop to bring the 3rd HH-43 into ops status, the two birds left for the rescue -- there were 3 pilots with the flight surgeon in the CP seat of the high bird -- I believe Capt Israel (Izzy) was the low bird lead with Capt Jim Rosenberg his CP and Capt Davis was flying the high bird with the flt surgeon -- anyway, it was during the rice paddy burning season and with no moon or stars and the limited instruments of the HH-43, the mission was one requiring the utmost in piloting skills -- but Izzy was successful -- being ignorant and without guidance about award nominations, I wrote them all up for an Air Medal -- in retrospect, it should have been for a Silver Star for they landed under such tuff flying conditions into an unknown guerrilla camp having only a campfire to guide them -- (as note, I was in attendance a year later when a SSgt PJ was awarded a DFC while flying as an observer on an HU-16 while flying escort on the HH-43s at an altitude of 16,000 ft!!! -- have no idea what the pilot crewmembers were awarded) --

As for Ron Bigoness, Capt James Rodenberg was my CP, SSgt Farmer (first name John I believe) and SSgt Boothby (do not recall his first name) HM were with me -- the photo I sent you was taken by Capt Davis from the high bird and I do not recall who was with him -- you may know that Davis was later killed while covering a crashed B-52 at the base near Bangkok) -- there is more to the NKP story much of which you can pickup at the below web site -- I also have McCutchen's and Freedman's e-addresses which I shall give you -- Izzy, by the way, got out of the service and flew helis for a good bit for Air America -- liked that part of the world so well he remains there today, living in Bangkok -- hope this all helps you --

McCutchen, Neil
 E-mail Address(es):
neiljmc@aol.com
 Freedman, Izzy
 E-mail Address(es):
freeizzy@ksc15.th.com

...and before you correspond with either of these two, check out this HH-43 web site which both McCutchen and I have contributed to including photos as well as more NKP stories -- of special interest should be my account of Fred Glover's idea of 55 gal fuel drums inside the HH-43 for range extension -- as an aside, we were very proud of that initiative for it saved some fighter pilots' butts including Ron Bigoness ---

08/27/1999

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From: ronald bigoness <ronndnlagov@webtv.net>
To: Robert LaPointe <rlapointe@gci.net>
Date: Thursday, September 30, 1999 2:52 PM
Subject: Re: Your SAR

My wingman's name was Capt. Lawrence "Dutch" Holland. I do not remember our call sign. Dutch was shot down in-country several weeks later. He was MIA for a long time. He is probably KIA now.

HOLLAND, LAWRENCE THOMAS



Name: Lawrence Thomas Holland
 Rank/Branch: O4/US Air Force
 Unit: Unknown (per Air Force)
 Date of Birth: 15 May 1934
 Home City of Record: Alhambra CA
 Date of Loss: 12 June 1965
 Country of Loss: South Vietnam
 Loss Coordinates: 113431N 1065341E (YT088795)
 Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
 Category: 1
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: F100D
 Refno: 0097
 Other Personnel in Incident: (none missing)

Source: Compiled by Homecoming II Project 01 April 1990 with the assistance of one or more of the following: raw data from U.S. Government agency sources, correspondence with POW/MIA families, published sources, interviews. Updated by the P.O.W. NETWORK 1998.

REMARKS: EJECTED - KILLED IN SHOOTOUT

SYNOPSIS: The North American F100 "Super Sabre" first saw action in Southeast Asia in northwest Laos in May 1962. F100 operations in Vietnam began in 1965, and took part in Operation Flaming Dart, the first U.S. Air Force strike against North Vietnam in February of that year. Further deployments of the aircraft to the area left just five F100 squadrons in the United States.

Various modifications were made to the aircraft affectionately called "Hun" or "Lead Sled" by its pilots and mechanics over the early years, gradually improving night bombing capability, firing systems and target-marking systems. The single seat models D and F were good at top cover and low attack, and could carry a heavy load of munitions.

Major Lawrence T. Holland was the pilot of an F100D dispatched on a tactical mission over South Vietnam. His aircraft was the lead in a flight of two F100's. After making passes on a target near Don Luan in Phuoc Long Province, Maj. Holland radiod his aircraft had been hit by hostile fire. A parachute was observed to alnd in 100 foot trees.

A rescue helicopter ladned in the nearest clearing and the helicopter crew proceeded on foot into the woods. They were fired upon by Viet Cong and they saw the enemy drag the limp body of Maj. Holland into a ditch. The helicopter crew were unable to rescue Maj. Holland.

In late August, 1971, the Department of the Air Force received information which they believed sufficient to determine that Holland had died at the time of the incident. It was determined Holland had been shot and killed by Viet Cong soldiers after he opened fire on them. Maj. Holland was reportedly buried in the immediate vicinity of the incident. At this time, his status was changed to Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered.

Holland is one of many who were almost in the grasp of rescue teams when they were last seen. Holland appears to have been dead at that time, but many others were alive. Some of the Americans who remain missing were actually photographed in captivity, only to disappear.

Since the war ended, nearly 10,000 reports have been received relating to Americans missing in Southeast Asia. Some authorities have reluctantly concluded that hundreds of Americans are still alive in captivity today. It would not appear that Lawrence T. Holland is one of them. But if there is even one American still alive, this government, which sent him, has a moral and legal obligation to bring him home.

Jay and Jill Strayer
3440 Paintersville - Port William Road
Jamestown, Ohio 45335
Phone: 937-486-2064

November 10, 1997

Ronald A. Bigonnes, LT Col USAF (Ret)
720 Inwood Lane
Nacogdoches, TX 75961

Dear Ron,

What a pleasant surprise to have you on the telephone after all these years of searching. I don't want you to believe I have done so religiously, but I have asked many people throughout my career who flew F-100s or was any kind of fighter pilot if he knew a guy named Bigonnes. Here's the story from my end:

I was a captain stationed at George AFB at the time and was sent TDY Jan 2, 1965 to the then unheard of place called Nachon Phanom AB, Thailand. The roads were unpaved and the red dust was awful during the summer. Though the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS) had a world wide plan of deployment for intact heli detachments (about 6 pilots and 20 enlisted), it went out the window early on. None of us six pilots assigned to NKP knew each other and there was some conflict as we struggled to come up with some sort of tactics for combat rescue. Luckily, I had taken the WW2 survival vest that was issued to me at Kincheloe AFB while flying in ADC (an F-106 operation) so I had a Thai lady copy it and make all of us survival vests for about \$6.00 apiece. If not the first in SEA, certainly they were originals. We did have an early type hand radio but no handguns. I took my own Ruger Blackhawk .357 for everything was pretty loose and I did not know what I was getting myself into.

Anyway, the HH-43B was designed to carry a 1,000 lb fire bottle to a crashed plane close to its intended landing site, so it was very range limited, only 75 NM. Even we understood that anyone needing rescue was out of luck if they went down farther than 75 NM from any HH-43 location. One of our pilots Fred Glover came up with the innovative idea of using 55 gal drums as aux tanks. The idea was brilliant, but had some risky drawbacks, the worst of which we only had water fittings scrounged from Air America at Udorn AB, and the fumes were awful - obviously there was no smoking while airborne!! We built a cradle that would hold three tanks inside the cabin with a hose running to an alternate fuel-fill opening into the 200 gallon bladder tank under the cabin floor. Indeed, we probably had the first jettisonable fuel tanks in AARS for when empty, the flight mechanic merely lifted it off the cradle and rolled it out the rear (clamshell doors always removed for the heat) into the jungle below. While a normal sortie generated 1.45 hrs flying time, each drum extended our time 35 minutes and about 35 miles. Although we did not get many pickups during that Jan-May time period, our follow-on crews flew as far as Vinh and Hanoi in NVN.

Our tactics included always flying with two ships much as you fighter guys do. We dubbed the two "low bird" and "high bird" with low bird lead the first to go in for the rescue and the high bird sitting up and away a mile or two as backup in case the first aborted or became rescues themselves. I was low bird pilot on alert the day we got called there was an F-100 lost in Laos near Mu Ghia Pass. We mapped out the route and distance and raced off to what we hoped would be a routine rescue.

I had you only 65 NM distant so it should be an easy one. But I screwed up, and got the heading wrong so we wound up spending lots of valuable time searching in the wrong area north of your actual location. By the time we realized our error, we had already gone through all of our aux fuel. Very frustrated, we finally corrected our earlier error and moved south to intersect the correct vector off of INVERT, the NKP TACAN.

INPUTED
CHAPTER 3

31 MAR
65 SAR
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We searched diligently and frantically for what seemed the longest time with no results and we were approaching BINGO fuel. As I recall, we were on our own for there was no sophisticated search system that subsequently developed from these early hard lessons. We did not know to call for fighter cover, for all of us were fresh from the States and none had any combat time or even knew how to spell the word. We were just hell bent to rescue a fellow American who was in trouble.

Anyway, one of my crew members caught a glimpse of a flashing, bright glint of metal and steered me to it. I recall we never saw any smoke though the visibility was pretty good. But there was your plane's wreckage scattered along a long stretch of thick jungle. (It will be interesting to hear your side of this story for I wonder how long it was you heard us before we saw you.) Strangely, I remember so much detail but do not remember that you popped a smoke though I believe you must have. As you remember, much of the jungle over there was as much as 300 ft deep. Our HH-43 only had 100 feet of rescue cable. That's why your picture shows me with the heli's wheels literally down into the tree tops for we barely had enough cable to let SSGT Farmer, pararescueman, to the ground where you were. I remember that I was really P.O.d at Farmer later for he took off his Vest with his radio and weapon for he said it was in his way to get into the rescue collar. So he would have complicated matters had we had to leave him there with you. I know why it is you were in so much pain coming up for the collar must have been around your dislocated arm. Too late for you, but soon after, we got the jungle penetrator throughout the helicopter force which got through the trees better and was easier for the survivor.

Anyway, got you we did and we RTBd to NKP as fast as we could go, all 85 knots. We logged 3+30 hrs on that sortie and but for the range extension afforded by the 55 gallon drums, you would have been there much longer and who knows to what fate. We landed with the low level light on as it was..

As for you crediting me with the very existence of your two boys, I am flattered but it is likely someone would have gotten you eventually even if we did not. What a pleasant and fortuitous surprise to find you after 32+ years and all because of an out-of-the dark call from a man who collects autographs for war story books. One he sent had a picture of the HH-43B and I relayed the story to him and that I had never located you. Your name was in his AF Association roster and he sent it to me via e-mail – and there you were on the first try. Had you been in my Daedalian roster, I would have located you much sooner. My, my, how nice to bring this event to closure.

As for me, I returned to SEA two more times without another combat rescue. I did however, participate in the Nov 21, 1970 raid on the Son Tay Prison Camp, 21 miles NE of Hanoi to try rescuing some of our POW friends. I was bitterly disappointed to find they had been moved. But that's another story.

I spent some 13 years in the rescue business, retiring as the CV of the 2750th ABWg at Wright Patterson AFB in Feb. 85. I have 1,000 hrs of fixed wing time and 4,000 hrs in helicopters. The last one was in the HH-53C which has air-to-air refueling and three 7.62 GE mini guns with selective rates of fire of 2,000 and 4,000 RPM, quite a tech jump ahead of the old HH-43B.

I trust you and your family are well beyond those earlier days. If one was not killed or a POW, there are many fond memories of the events and people who formed those events. Write to me please.

Cheers,



JAY M. STRAYER
Colonel, USAF (Ret)

From: Jay Strayer <mrslick@in-touch.net>
 To: Robert LaPointe <rlapointe@gci.net>
 Date: Friday, August 27, 1999 7:55 AM
 Subject: Re: SEA SAR

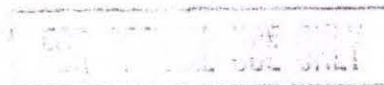
I don't know about the Thailand mission, but I do know about the one in Laos as it came from our outfit at NKP in early March -- after a long lull, NVN bombing began anew in early March 65 -- we were bored after being at NKP since 2 or 3 Jan -- all of us came from separate USA dets and did not know each other till then -- we teamed into pairs, hard crews if you will, and began putting together some combat rescue flying rules since we had no training at all of same -- we had heard of formation flying and quickly decided we should always fly in pairs as the fighter guys did -- not sure we were the first, but we called the lead bird the low bird and the second the high bird -- the DETCO was Capt Warren Davis who commanded only because he was the ranking officer -- we moved into the first hooches built -- NKP was primarily a radar site and commanded by Major (first name not remembered) diamond -- knowing our priorities, we promptly designated the first hootch the officers club, the second the rescue det officers' living quarters (6 of us) and the third the fire dept in which those members lived -- because we were bored and none of us had "seen the world", it occurred to us it was a good idea to travel around the country -- we did fly the flight surgeon and a dental tech into surrounding Thai villages to help with medical problems -- I recall we did this on our own initiative -- we also drew straws to see in what turn we could take the twice weekly C-123 courier to to visit Bangkok on the pretense of having one of the HH-43s battery's checked over -- not all that much of a pretense for we had no aux power units for engine start, only the battery -- I drew the number one slot for such a visit and unknown to me, air attacks on the North were under way as the C-123 I was aboard was taking off for Bangkok, thus I missed all the activity that day -- Rescue rules were such we could not fly the HH-43 without a copilot so the det was a pilot short because of my absence -- Capt Fred Glover and 1Lt McCutchen were directed to fly to Ubon AB and stand alert so that left only one HH-43 at NKP -- later that nite, the det was ordered into Laos to rescue a downed USAF pilot and in so doing made the first nite rescue of that campaign -- after a quick test hop to bring the 3rd HH-43 into ops status, the two birds left for the rescue -- there were 3 pilots with the flight surgeon in the CP seat of the high bird -- I believe Capt Israel (Izzy) was the low bird lead with Capt Jim Rosenberg his CP and Capt Davis was flying the high bird with the flt surgeon -- anyway, it was during the rice paddy burning season and with no moon or stars and the limited instruments of the HH-43, the mission was one requiring the utmost in piloting skills -- but Izzy was successful -- being ignorant and without guidance about award nominations, I wrote them all up for an Air Medal -- in retrospect, it should have been for a Silver Star for they landed under such tuff flying conditions into an unknown guerrilla camp having only a campfire to guide them -- (as note, I was in attendance a year later when a SSgt PJ was awarded a DFC while flying as an observer on an HU-16 while flying escort on the HH-43s at an altitude of 16,000 ft!!! -- have no idea what the pilot crewmembers were awarded) --

As for Ron Bigoness, Capt James Rodenberg was my CP, SSgt Farmer (first name John I believe) and SSgt Boothby (do not recall his first name) HM were with me -- the photo I sent you was taken by Capt Davis from the high bird and I do not recall who was with him -- you may know that Davis was later killed while covering a crashed B-52 at the base near Bangkok) -- there is more to the NKP story much of which you can pickup at the below web site -- I also have McCutchen's and Freedman's e-addresses which I shall give you -- Izzy, by the way, got out of the service and flew helis for a good bit for Air America -- liked that part of the world so well he remains there today, living in Bangkok -- hope this all helps you --

McCutchen, Neil
 E-mail Address(es):
neiljmc@aol.com
 Freedman, Izzy
 E-mail Address(es):
freeizzy@ksc15.th.com

...and before you correspond with either of these two, check out this HH-43 web site which both McCutchen and I have contributed to including photos as well as more NKP stories -- of special interest should be my account of Fred Glover's idea of 55 gal fuel drums inside the HH-43 for range extension -- as an aside, we were very proud of that initiative for it saved some fighter pilots' butts including Ron Bigoness ---

08/27/1999



Detachment 5
Pacific Air Rescue Center
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
APO US Forces 96337

REPLY TO
ATTN OF: Det 5 PARC

3 April 1965

SUBJECT: Narrative Report of Mission Number 277 Det 3 31 March 65

TO: DOARO

Supplemental Narrative Report on Det 3 PARC Mission 277 on 31 March 1965. Major Shook's crew was notified of a SAR incident at 0925L. We were airborne at 1000L and were briefed that a man had been spotted in a life raft at 2010N 10737E. With vectors from land and airborne radar we arrived over the scene at 1130L. The downed pilot was being covered by Navy A1E's and F8U's from nearby carriers. After extensive water evaluation, Capt Richardson pilot made an open sea landing. While taxiing to life raft, the pilot indicated that he had an injured arm. Approximately 20 feet away SSgt Stone pararescue man jumped into the water and pulled the life raft to the aircraft. The F8A pilot was Cmdr William N. Donnelly from the USS Coral Sea. He was shot down on the 29th of March. After a successful take off the HU-16 landed at Danang AB at 1410L. Crew members on the HU-16 were Maj Kenneth L. Shook, Rescue Crew Commander, Capt David K. Richardson, Pilot, Lt Jack O. Slocombe, Navigator, SSgt David E. West, Flight Engineer, A2C Robert M. Shimamoto, Radio Operator, SSgt Richard N. Stone, Pararescue, A2C Robert J. Lubbers, Pararescue.

KENNETH L. SHOOK
Major, USAF
Rescue Crew Commander

Info Copy to
Det 3 PARC



On March 31st I happen to be on alert, it was late afternoon, maybe 5 p.m., when a Maj. Panas ejected from his 100 or 105 I don't know which, As we got ready take off a radio message from Hq. In Saigon, cancelled the mission until the next day, it was to late to get fighter coverage. We shut down and I turned to Romish and said we might catch hell tomorrow, I think we might as well get loaded and enjoy tonight, We had just ordered our second drink when Capt. Davis came in, He was pissed, and said if we were willing he'd go right now, The pilot had his beacon on and cover aircraft knew his position, it was real dark by the time we got there, and he had landed in rice patty next to a village, they had a large bon fire and we had a good landing area, our plan was to have Romish was to cover the left side and I'd cover the right and assist the pilot if he needed help, the only help he needed was for me to hold his bowl of soup while he got in, we were very close to Hanoi, but the natives were friendly, April 65 things started to get rough, I was glad I was leaving just as soon as my replacement arrived, and around 5 April, Dennis Kraft and Roy [Shirer???], I had my bags packed and leaving just as soon as the plane unloaded its cargo, I pointed out the section an what all the buildings were, and we had about 1 hour on the ground, As I got on the plane they were carrying there bags to the ops building to check in. before they were there 5 minutes, a plane went down and they jumped on the chopper and went on a mission, I spent a few days getting back to the states and I walked into the section at Hamillton AFB the first thing they wanted to know if I'd seen Roy [S] then I found out he was in the Hospital and had beat me back to the states, his first mission he took a hit in the ass and air evac back. Well that's my story and I;m sticking to it. If I can be any help just let me know. E.J Farmer.

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first mission he took a hit in the ass and air evac back. Well that's my story and I;m sticking to it. If I can be any help just let me know. E.J Farmer.

14 Sept 99

Hi Dennis,

Hope this letter finds you in good health. I think I spoke with you at the last PJ reunion about a book that I am writing about PJ's in Vietnam. EJ Farmer mailed me the enclosed letter. It mentions you and another PJ named Roy (last name uncertain). Could you fill in any details on this mission?

If you have access to e-mail, please reply to me at rlapointe@gci.net

If you use the post office my address is 7440 Margaret Circle
 Anchorage, AK 99518

In case you did not get a copy of the handout I passed out at the reunion, I've included another one. If you have any info you would like included in the book please send it to me.

I have a web site out explaining the project and its status. It's URL is
home.gci.net/~rlapointe

I would appreciate any help you could provide in identifying the PJ that was listed as WIA in EJ's letter.

Bob