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In August 1965, the 602nd Air Commando Squadron began rotating its A-1E aircraft from Bien Hoa to Udorn to provide RESCORT. In February 1966, the 602nd Air Commando Squadron moved all of its operations to Udorn, with SAR RESCORT as one of its primary missions. ^{97/}

With this USAF buildup, direct SAR support from Air America in Laos was needed less. Air America continued to provide SAR for the RLAF, their own operations, and on an on-cell basis for U.S. aircraft. At present Air American continues to furnish the USAF SAR forces with staging sites, weather information, and intelligence, all of which are indispensable to successful operations. ^{98/}

The USAF SAR equipment and its disposition in the summer and fall of 1965, was still an interim proposition. The longer range and greater speed of the CH-30 were significant improvements, but their small number, and their lack of survivability in combat, limited their effectiveness. One of the two helicopters assigned was usually out of commission. Consequently, they could not be employed as a pair. This single mode of operation is avoided if at all possible. ^{99/} These two shortcomings were both tragically brought out during a rescue mission, 6-7 November 1965.

On 5 November, Oak Lead, an F-105, disappeared over NVN. There was some possibility that the pilot had survived, since his plane was last seen heading into a cloud, and an electronic search was initiated by two A-1E aircraft on the following day. Although the

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pilots had plotted a course around known gun positions, one of the A-1E's was shot down by automatic weapons fire. A CH-3C was sent to the location where it was believed that the A-1E went down. As it arrived in the area, the helicopter was hit by ground fire and the crew bailed out. Since little ground fire was actually reported by the RESCORT, a second helicopter would probably have had a good chance of recovering the crew. The RCC at Udorn scrambled the two HH-43's at Lima Site 36, but the 2AD Command Post overruled this order and directed a recall of all SAR forces. 100/

The USN, however, had launched a helicopter to attempt a recovery of the CH-3C crew. The A-1E's, which had not withdrawn in spite of the order, were directed to meet this helicopter at the coast and escort it to the scene. On the way to the rendezvous the wingman reported ground fire, pulled into the clouds, and no further contact was ever made with him. The remaining A-1E and the helicopter searched the area until the helicopter had to refuel. Even though it was dark by that time, the helicopter returned and made voice contact with one of the crew members. Fortunately, the crew member, SSgt Naugle, had a cigarette lighter which he used to signal the helicopter. A successful pick-up was made but Captain Warren Lilly and his other crew members could not be located. 101/

The next morning the Navy helicopter set out to try to recover the remaining crew members. Enroute a MIG alert was received and the helicopter descended to get between cloud layers. It was hit by

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automatic weapons fire, the fuel lines were ruptured, and it made an emergency landing in North Vietnam. The two escort aircraft were also hit and one of them had to make a gear up landing at Da Nang. The second USAF CH-3C was on its way to the bailout site when it received word about the Navy helicopter in distress. It diverted and between the CH-3C and another Navy helicopter all of the crew members were recovered. Neither had enough fuel, however, to proceed to the other crash scenes. 102/

A first light search was conducted on 8 November for the unrecovered crew members. The A-1E's picked up a beeper signal but, as more aircraft entered the area, heavy ground fire was encountered and several planes sustained battle damage. At this point the mission was suspended. 103/

This mission not only illustrates the shortcomings mentioned above but also indicates how critical judgment and coordination become in a search and rescue effort. The original decision to conduct a search for Oak Lead was based on the slim possibility that, because of the cloud deck and the general confusion in Oak flight at the time, the pilot could have made a successful bailout without being seen. The position originally given for the first A-1E pilot's bailout turned out to be wrong, thus compounding the confusion that existed. At one point the A-1E's and the Navy helicopter were not acting in coordination with the central controlling authority. When disaster follows disaster, at what point should the mission be suspended? Differences of opinion

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requirements of an expanding and contracting conflict. Improved rescue aircraft and equipment enhanced aircrew recovery capabilities, as doctrine and tactics evolved to meet the changing demands imposed by ever-improving enemy defenses.

Most of the time, planning, skill, tactics, and equipment, combined with raw courage of the men, pulled rescue forces through the most precarious situations. Death or captivity, however, were always possibilities. All these elements were present during a rescue effort that began on November 5, 1965, when Oak 01, an F-105 returning from a mission near Hanoi, flew into a cloud and disappeared. The wingman reported Oak 01's last known position, but noticed no antiaircraft fire, missile firings, or explosion. Because of the rapidly deteriorating weather and approaching darkness no rescue attempt was made.

At dawn, under clearing skies, Sandy 11 and Sandy 12, a pair of A-1s, flew over North Vietnam to where Oak 01 had disappeared. Antiaircraft fire hit Sandy 12, and the pilot ejected. Sandy 11 circled and soon spotted the downed pilot. Jolly Green 85, a CH-3C commanded by Capt. Warren R. Lilly, was enroute to the survivor as two more A-1Es scrambled from Udorn to form a search and rescue task force. Enemy small arms fire cut into Jolly 85 as it neared the survivor. Lilly managed to raise his badly damaged helicopter to an altitude sufficient for bailing out. As the Sandys circled, Lilly punched in the automatic pilot and made his way to the door. Pilots in the A-1s reported that four chutes had opened and soon made voice and beeper contact with the downed crewmen. Normally, since rescue helicopters usually flew in pairs to meet emergencies like this, the second chopper — the high bird — would have swooped in for the recovery. But, because of mechanical problems, only Jolly Green 85 was available for this particular mission.

Help, however, was on the way. A U.S. Navy Sikorsky SH-3 Sea Knight helicopter, Nimble 62, reported it was flying toward the crash scene from the carrier *Independence*. Two A-1Es, Sandys 13 and 14, flew to intercept the Sea Knight and escort it into the rescue area. They rendezvoused with Nimble 62 just east of the Vietnamese coast and flew alongside it over the beach and westward toward the jungled mountains of North Vietnam. When the pilot of Sandy 14 spotted 37-mm tracers he peeled off into a cloud in an evasive maneuver. Like Oak 01, Sandy 14 disappeared forever. Sandy 13 and Nimble 62 searched the area but found no sign of wreckage or a survivor. When their fuel ran low the A-1s returned to Udorn and Nimble 62 flew back to its carrier. After refueling, Nimble 62, with an escort of Navy A-1Es, returned to search for Sandy 14, but after an hour without contact with the missing pilot they flew on to the wreckage of Jolly Green 85. At dusk, just before abandoning the search until dawn, a Navy A-1 pilot monitored a beeper's signal. As darkness engulfed the circling task force, Nimble 62 dipped down for a tree-top level visual search. The copilot spot-

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ted a tiny light and ordered the penetrator down to pick up the parajumper from Jolly Green 85. The A-1Es and the helicopter, with an Air Force sergeant — who would be forever associated with the U.S. Navy and his Zippo cigarette lighter — the *Independence*.⁴⁹

The early rays of the sun shined off the Gulf of Tonkin as Nimble 62 and its crew members stepped off the carrier's deck and set a course for the Jolly Green coast of North Vietnam came into view. A radar picket plane issued a Mig alert. Enemy jets were seen in the sky. Fishermen on sampans were clearly visible. The helicopter and its escort flew just above the waves then skimmed over the beaches to the jungle where they encountered intense small arms fire. Nimble 62 shuddered as bullets tore through its skin to slash at fuel lines and control cables. Unable to turn back because of rapid fuel loss, the helicopter pilot made a controlled crash-landing inside North Vietnam. As the downed aircrew broke out M-16s and prepared to fight for their lives, the A-1s blasted enemy troops moving toward the wreckage. Meanwhile, a second Sea Knight scrambled from the *Independence* as a CH-3C left its forward operating base in Laos. The North Vietnamese moved an antiaircraft gun into the area and the A-1 pilots suddenly realized they were involved in a shoot-out. Heavily damaged, the two Skyraiders limped southward to make gear-up belly landings at Da Nang. Meanwhile, the Sea Knight raced to the crash site and rescued all the survivors. Additional A-1s from the carrier then demolished the downed chopper to keep it from falling into enemy hands.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, encouraged by the rescue of the parajumper, the search for other survivors of Jolly Green 85 continued. Late on the afternoon of November 7, an Air Force Sandy pilot heard a beeper signal, but darkness precluded pinpointing the source. Throughout the night, in operations rooms at Udorn and Nakhon Phanom, at the Joint Search and Rescue Center in Saigon and Rescue Control Center at Da Nang, and aboard the *Independence*, intelligence officers, operations officers, and pilots planned the next day's efforts. On flight lines and in hangars throughout South Vietnam and Thailand, as well as in the bowels of the *Independence*, mechanics and munitions loaders prepared their planes and helicopters. In the jungles of North Vietnam the enemy cleaned their weapons and rested before the inevitable fight. An aerial task force of A-1s, CH-3Cs, and SH-3s rose with the sun and converged on the Jolly Green crash. Air Force F-100s from Da Nang and Navy F-8 Crusaders from the *Independence* flew toward their assigned anti-Mig combat air patrol orbit.

A-1s flew low over the helicopter wreckage and finally picked up the sound of a beeper. Two Air Force Skyraider pilots were concentrating on the signal when enemy gunfire ripped, almost simultaneously, into both airplanes. While the two damaged A-1s returned to Udorn, their comrades strafed the enemy gunners who answered with 23-mm, 37-mm, and small

arms fire. Meanwhile, rescue controllers in Saigon and at the rescue control centers at Udorn and Da Nang decided that further efforts would only result in additional casualties. Grudgingly they called off the rescue operations. Their decision, though a painful one, was correct. Capt. Warren Lilly, Lt. Jerry Singleton, and SSgt Arthur Cromier, captured soon after parachuting into the jungle, were already miles away, on their way to prison camps in Hanoi.⁵¹

Rescue was indeed a risky business, and A-1 pilots shared the danger with the chopper crews. By 1967 the A-1E had the highest overall loss rate of any airplane in Southeast Asia. Skyraider loss rates per 1,000 sorties ranged from 1.0 in South Vietnam to 2.3 over Laos and up to 6.2 for missions over North Vietnam. The high loss rate over North Vietnam was directly attributable to the A-1s rescue escort role. Of the twenty-five A-1s shot down over North Vietnam between June 1966 and June 1967, seven were lost on rescue missions.⁵²

Korean War vintage, propeller-driven A-1 Skyraiders, like the helicopters they escorted, were slow and faced extreme danger when flying into an area where enemy defenses could shoot down a modern jet fighter. Careful mission planning followed by controlled execution took some edge off the danger. The task of controlling rescue missions evolved with the increasing commitment of American forces.

Before June 1964, the covert nature of operations buried the rescue task in secrecy as search and rescue controllers worked in a liaison capacity within the air operations center at Tan Son Nhut. With the rapid increase in air activity, starting in August 1964 and gaining momentum thereafter, the cloak of secrecy lifted and rescue personnel began functioning overtly. On July 1, 1965, when Detachment 3, Pacific Air Rescue Center, became the 38th Air Rescue Squadron, manning the Joint Search and Rescue Center, functioning in Tan Son Nhut's Air Operations Center since 1962, became part of their mission.⁵³

The Joint Search and Rescue Center was responsible for rescue operations in the Bangkok-Saigon Flight Information Regions. It had overall control for coordination of rescue activities in the Republic of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and most of North Vietnam, with the Seventh Fleet having control of search and rescue in the waters adjacent to North Vietnam. The rescue control centers at Da Nang and Udorn had regional responsibilities and acted in a liaison capacity.⁵⁴ Search and rescue in South Vietnam was necessarily a coordinated effort involving the Air Force, U.S. Army, Marines, and the Vietnamese Air Force. Coordination was accomplished through the Joint Search and Rescue Center, the Tactical Air Control Center at Tan Son Nhut, corps direct air support centers — responsible for coordinated air activity within each of the four corps areas — and other agencies like the rescue coordination centers at Da Nang and Udorn. While the Vietnamese Air Force was responsible for its own rescue func-