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FROM: Det 6, 38th Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Sq, APO US FORCES 96227
SUBJECT: Mission Narrative Report 6-25-12 February 1966 13 Feb 66
TO: 3rd Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Gp (JSARCC), APO US FORCES 96307

1. Mission Number: 6-25-12 Feb 66.
2. SAR Alerted by: 3rd AFRGp JSARCC.
3. Type SAR aircraft used: Two (2) HH-43F helicopters.

Primary Recovery Helicopter Crew - Pedro 74 (6 combat saves):

RCC	Capt	Edwin A. Henningson	Det 6, 38th ARRS
CP	1st Lt	Mark C. Schibler	Det 6, 38th ARRS
HM	TSgt	Richard A. Cannon	Det 6, 38th ARRS
RS	SSgt	Leon Fullwood	Det 6, 38th ARRS

Secondary Recovery Helicopter Crew - Pedro 97 (4 combat saves):

RCC	Capt	Maurice G. Kessler	Det 6, 38th ARRS
CP	Capt	Dale L. Potter	Det 6, 38th ARRS
HM	A1C	Gerald C. Hammond Jr.	Det 6, 38th ARRS
RS	A1C	William H. Pitsenbarger	Det 6, 38th ARRS

4. Reaction time from initial notification to pick-up: Thirty-seven minutes.
5. CAP assistance: One (1) USAF O-1F FAC; Rescort: Four (4) U.S. Army UH-1B helicopter gunships.
6. Area and type of pick ups: Day and night recoveries with rescue hoist and stokes litter from hostile area heavily wooded with trees 100 feet high.
7. Signalling equipment used to locate wounded evacuees: Smoke grenades and flashlights.
8. Survivor's names and serial numbers: Neither available nor possible to obtain.

9. Summary of events:

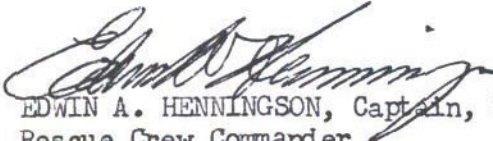
At 1803 hours word was received that "First Infantry Division was in trouble again" and had one litter casualty and three walking wounded which required rescue hoist recovery from a heavily wooded jungle area (coordinates 10° 42' N, 107° 06' E). This area was very near the same spot where we had recovered one litter casualty and one deceased earlier in the day (coordinates 10° 42' N, 107° 08' E). The area was described as not secure, and the battle conditions were considered worse than those which had existed during the previous mission that day (Mission number 6-23-12 Feb 66). Wide spread and continuous contact with the Viet Cong were reported in all quadrants. A USAF Forward Air Controller (FAC) was "capping" the pick-up site, and U.S. Army UH-1B gunship helicopters were already orbiting the scene. The recovery area was 133 degrees at 24 miles from Bien Hoa AB, so it was necessary to top-off the helicopter fuel loads prior to launch. Response from POL was excellent and the primary recovery helicopter (Pedro 74) was scrambled and airborne at 1810 hours for a reaction time of seven minutes. The secondary recovery helicopter (Pedro 97) was launched just a few minutes later. Although weather was not a factor at any time during the mission, less than an hour of daylight remained before nightfall. During the flight enroute to the pick up scene, the FAC briefed the ground battle situation, recommended approach/departure routes, and advised that there was continuous ground fire in the recovery area; this ground fire was later reported to have continued throughout the recovery effort, although our crewmembers reported hearing only three rounds near Pedro 74. A perimeter had been established around the pick up site, but was described as not fully secure. The FAC also advised us that there were now five casualties to be evacuated, all litter cases. As we arrived over the pick up site, the ground party ignited two smoke flares in a small hole which had been cleared in the dense jungle canopy. Although these trees were approximately 100 feet high, no difficulty was encountered in locating the recovery site until the last series of pick-ups; the approach for these final recoveries was conducted in total darkness as was the remainder of the mission. Although it made the helicopter a vulnerable target for Viet Cong ground fire, it was necessary to use the helicopter landing and flood lights during the remainder of the flight. The aircraft lighting and assistance from ground party and FAC radio vectors helped Pedro 74 in locating the darkened hole in the trees for the final three pick-ups. During the course of the recovery effort, ground casualties apparently continued to mount, and before the operation had been completed the number of wounded had risen to ten, all stokes litter recovery cases. Pedro 74 and Pedro 97 alternated sorties in and out of the pick-up site. While one recovery helicopter was conducting hoist operations over the hole in the trees, the other was air evac'ing it's load of wounded to the U.S. Army hospital near X. Go Dau approximately six miles away.

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At times, moderate difficulty was experienced hovering the helicopter during the hoist operations due to the wind gusts and turbulence in the area. At a point about midway through the final series of hoist recoveries, a USAF C-47 flare ship arrived on scene, and dropped two flares. The first of these fell behind the hovering Pedro 74, and was of little actual benefit or hinderance. However, the second flare descended in front of the helicopter and caused a pronounced glare and blinding effect until it had burned out. This glare was considered hazardous to crewmembers conducting hoisting operations under such conditions; it destroys night vision, and actually limits the effectiveness of the installed helicopter lighting. After the last of the evacuees were on board the helicopter, Pedro 74 climbed out from the darkened jungle, rendezvoused with Pedro 97, and both helicopters recovered at the hospital near X. Go Dau to offload the wounded and refuel. On the return flight to Bien Hoa it was necessary to obtain a GCI controlled recovery in order to avoid the artillery barrage in our flight quadrant. The statistical summary for the mission reflects a total of 13 sorties for five hours, and ten combat saves. The control and coordination provided by the FAC at the scene was outstanding. The efforts of ground radio personnel at the pick-up site were also very helpful. Together these two parties were largely responsible for the smooth running manner which characterized the whole operation; radio "chatter" was minimized, and communications discipline was excellent. The protective coverage and fire support by the armed UH-1B gunships was extremely prompt, timely and effective, especially so considering the dangers inherent in low altitude sweep operations at night. The overall support from all personnel involved in the effort, such as medical personnel at the hospital helipad, etc., was superb. The natural hazards and calculated risks associated with recovery operations such as the one described in this narrative are well known; they require the optimum in crew performance, coordination, and aggressiveness. The crews of both recovery helicopters responded beautifully to the urgency of the situation. Their performance was a model of dedicated professionalism. One suggestion seems appropriate relative to the operation: When it is necessary to use parachute flares to illuminate an area, the following factors appear to merit consideration:

a. The light from the flares seems to be of greatest benefit for the approach, landing and take off phases of the mission. Their effectiveness to a helicopter hovering in the trees is limited. The second recovery helicopter (Pedro 97) in a high orbit around the pick-up scene reported excellent visibility from their light.

b. Whenever possible, the flares should be dropped behind the hovering helicopter or its approach/departure route, in order to minimize the glare effect.


EDWIN A. HENNINGSON, Captain, USAF
Rescue Crew Commander

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