

33rd ARRS, Jan - Mar 1966

life raft and dropped smoke. A second smoke was dropped to mark the exact spot. At this time a C-3A chopper was arriving on the scene. The chopper recovered #1 and #2 survivors. The HU-16 crew continued the search because they were advised it was a B-66 with six people aboard that had gone down. The navigator eventually picked up beeper to the left, turned 90 degrees left and survivor #3 was spotted in an LPU. A smoke bomb was dropped to mark location of #3 survivor. As the chopper was rescuing #3 survivor a Navy P-3A pilot advised he had seen a raft but lost it. The HU-16 made an electronics run and survivor #4 was spotted on the first pass. Smoke was dropped and the chopper moved in position to make its 4th pick-up. Survivor #5 was spotted by the ALE but visual contact was lost. The HU-16 made another electronics run, #5 survivor was spotted in an LPU. Smoke was dropped again to mark location. Survivor #5 was picked up at 1850 local. Search was continued for survivor #6 until 2010 local before the HU-16 had to return to "home base". The missing man was the last one to leave the aircraft (maybe he didn't). The HU-16 received no damage.

CREW	RCC	Captain Gary L. Nelson
	CP	Captain Frank J. Linseinsen
	NAV	1st Lt Lynn E. Martinson
	RO	ALC James C. Davis
	FM	TSgt Lyle E. Martinie
	PJ	A2C Jerry L. Coy

(5) Mission #1-3-18-14 March 1966. 1 sortie. An HU-16 on orbit over the Gulf of Tonkin was notified that an F-4C crew had been downed by hostile gunfire. There were two survivors in the water and the HU-16 crew proceeded to and landed for a water pick-up. The HU-16 was drawing heavy fire from shore batteries as the first F-4C pilot was being pulled aboard. The Albatross was hit by artillery fire and immediately burst into flame. The crew abandoned the HU-16 and the two survivors were picked up by U.S. Navy helicopters. Two HU-16 crewmen were killed by the artillery burst and/or resulting explosion. The F-4C pilots, Captain Bryant and Major Peerson, received back injuries. The pilot and copilot of the HU-16 escaped unhurt. The navigator and Flight Mechanic sustained serious injuries and were evacuated to U.S. Naval vessels for medical treatment.

CREW	RCC	Captain David P. Westenbarger
	CP	1st Lt Walter E. Hall
	NAV	Captain Donald S. Price(Wounded in Action)
	RO	ALC Robert L. Hilton (Killed in Action)
	FM	SSgt Clyde W. Jackson III(Wounded in Action)
	PJ	ALC James E. Pleiman (Killed in Action)

On many missions, the HU-16's have encountered ground fire, but, to date, only one aircraft has been destroyed. On 14 March 1966, two USAF F-4C pilots ejected and landed about two miles from shore. Crown Bravo, piloted by Captain Westenbarger, landed to make the recovery. As the aircraft taxied toward the downed crew, it was hit by a mortar shell. The explosion killed the radio operator instantly and the aircraft began to sink. Four of the crew members got out. They and the F-4C crew were rescued by helicopters from the Yorktown and the England. The pararescue-
man was not recovered and is presumed to have gone down with the plane. 134/

RESCUE MISSION IN TONKIN GULF

WOUNDED, CAPTAIN PRICE^{MAC}
HAD NO CHOICE EXCEPT
TO KEEP PULLING
THE RAFT AWAY
FROM FLAMING OIL
AND ENEMY GUNS.

by GLENN INFELD



CAPTAIN DONALD S. PRICE, of Pennsauken, New Jersey, released his safety belt as soon as the HU-16 Albatross amphibian touched down in the Gulf of Tonkin. Leaning far forward in his navigator's compartment, he saw the downed USAF jet pilot bobbing in his bright orange life raft, a few yards to the right of the tail section of the Albatross.

"He's right behind the tail section and a little to the starboard," Price called over the intercom to Captain David Westenbarger, the aircraft commander.

"Roger. Reversing engines."

As he waited for the familiar roar of the propellers to go into reverse pitch, Price glanced nervously at the nearby enemy shore of North Vietnam. It wasn't the first time he had landed in the Gulf of Tonkin in an Albatross. In November, 1965, his crew had pulled a RF-101 reconnaissance pilot out of the water and returned him to his base in South Vietnam. Still, Price couldn't get accustomed to being so close to the enemy coast, to be bobbing up and down in a vulnerable, slow-moving amphibian that was practically under the barrels of Communist guns.

The loud roar of the engines jerked Captain Price's eyes from the enemy shoreline back to the downed jet pilot. The HU-16 eased closer and closer to the raft, then stopped.

"All right, Pleiman, let's get him aboard," pilot Westenbarger called.

Price saw the pararescueman, A1C James E. Pleiman of Russia, Ohio, leap from the rear hatch of the Albatross and swim towards the raft. Captain Price could see that the downed pilot was injured; blood stains speckled the side of the bright orange raft.

WHEN Pleiman reached the raft, the flyer grabbed the line and held on tight. *Good, Price thought. Now as soon as we get the co-pilot, we can get out of here. I wonder—*

Then the barrage of enemy shells began...

The amphibian raised out of the water several inches, its nose higher than its tail. Before he could get a grip on a fuselage brace, Price tumbled backwards to the floor. A fire extinguisher broke loose from its bracket and fell on his stomach; simultaneously, the flare gun smashed against his head. Dazed and confused, the navigator tried to get back on his feet.

Red shells slammed into the hull of the amphibian, tearing jagged holes in the metal. Price, finally managing to struggle to his knees, saw geysers of water fountain skyward alongside the Albatross as the North Vietnamese gunners lobbed 105mm shells at the plane. Stitches of machine-gun fire turned the area into froth, and as Westenbarger gunned the engines of the plane, he added to the deafening blasts of the enemy guns.

"Do you have him inside yet, Pleiman?"

Price heard the pilot frantically trying to contact the pararescuemen on the intercom, but Pleiman didn't answer. Price tried to spot the pararescuemen from his compartment window but the erupting water, and smoke from the exploding shells, disturbed his view.

continued on next page

RESCUE MISSION IN TONKIN GULF

continued

Grabbing the microphone, Price called, "I'll check on him, Captain."

He ran towards the rear of the amphibian, bounced from one side of the fuselage to the other as near-misses rocked the Albatross. It was obvious that the Communist gunners had held their fire until the amphibian touched down and was most vulnerable, then had opened up with everything they had—from automatic rifle fire to 105mm howitzers. As he fought his way towards the rear hatch to help the pararescuer drag the injured jet pilot into the plane, Price knew that in a matter of minutes the Albatross would be past the flying stage, that it would be shot to pieces unless it could get out of the target area.

At the rear hatch, navigator Price saw the flight mechanic, Sgt. Clyde William Jackson, of Fort Royal, Virginia, leaning far outside the plane in an attempt to help Pleiman drag the downed jet pilot inside the plane. Turning to A1C Robert Hilton, the radio operator, Price bellowed, "Help him! Help him!"

Hilton, however, had already moved to the hatch and was reaching out to grab the side of the raft.

"Try and get him close. We'll pull him in as we take—"

Suddenly, a crashing shell exploded. Price had seen other 105mm shells hit the water, had heard machine-gun bullets thud into the Albatross, but this time there had been no warning. One moment he had been yelling instructions to the men at the hatch; the next, he had been flying through the air towards the aft bulkhead of the amphibian. The 105mm shell had entered the HU-16 just aft of the right wheel housing, exploded, and opened up a nine-foot hole in the fuselage. Price, not certain of what had happened, had smashed into the bulkhead and fallen to the floor, momentarily stunned.

He fought to open his eyes, to clear his brain, but it was several seconds before he succeeded.

The inside of the plane was a roaring inferno. Gasoline poured from ruptured fuel lines and flamed instantly. A JATO bottle exploded, hurtling pieces of metal through the plane like shrapnel. Price could barely breathe in the stifling heat and the billowing smoke.

"Hilton... Hilton, where are you?"

When there was no answer Price crawled toward the hatch. He had gone only a short distance when he saw the radio operator. One look was enough. Hilton was dead, victim of a direct hit.

"My God!"

THE flames were now threatening to cut off his escape through the hatch so the dazed navigator tried to move faster. As he neared the hatch he grabbed a fuselage brace and started to pull himself to his feet, knowing that his best chance of survival was to dive as far from the amphibian as possible. It was obvious that the plane was going to explode.

As he regained his feet he saw a dark object floating in the water beside the aircraft, not recognizing it until an enemy shell hit nearby and a wave turned it towards him.

"Pleiman!"

The pararescuer was dead, too. Approximately five feet from the dead airman, Price spotted the orange raft with the injured jet pilot still inside it.

The flyer was staring at him helplessly.

"I'll get you if—"

At that moment, as Price tensed to dive out of the burning amphibian, a second JATO bottle exploded. The flash of fire hit the navigator in the face, searing his hair, face and eyebrows. It also blinded him, and before the stunned captain could regain his balance, he tumbled out of the hatch and into the water, into the midst of flaming oil and gasoline and the exploding enemy shells...

The fine work of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service in Southeast Asia is well known. The pickup rate for downed USAF, Navy and Marine pilots is high; some flyers barely get their feet wet before an air rescue aircraft plucks them from the water. Sometimes, however, it is not quite so easy, and the mission of March 14, 1966, was one of the most rugged yet experienced.

When it ended an HU-16 amphibian had been sunk for the first time since 1949, when the HU-16 originally went into service, and one member of the rescue crew received the Air Force Cross—the nation's second highest military award for valor.

The mission began routinely. A Phantom F4B jet, operated by Air Force Major James M. Peerson and his copilot, Captain Lynwood C. Bryant, was hit by enemy ground fire as it came off target in North Vietnam, about 50 miles west of the Gulf of Tonkin. Peerson immediately guided his crippled plane towards the water, and radioed for help.

"Mayday, Mayday! Crown Alpha this is Pluto Lead. Hit by ground fire. Heading for the gulf to eject. Present position is 20 miles southwest of Thanh Hoa."

THE amphibian carrying navigator Price and his crew had been circling over the Gulf of Tonkin when the distress call had been picked up. The pilot had immediately banked his Albatross southwest and raced to the area at full speed. Meanwhile, another Phantom jet notified the 4500-ton destroyer USS Berkeley, sailing in the Gulf of Tonkin to coordinate rescue efforts, of the position of the damaged aircraft.

"This is Pluto Two. Two-man crew ejecting now. Estimated touch-down position is seven miles offshore near Hon Me Island."

When Price heard the position report he studied the map on his navigation table for several seconds before calling his aircraft commander on the intercom. Price didn't like what he saw on the map.

"Captain, if they land near Hon Me Island as reported, we may be in trouble. The Communists have enough guns on the island to fight a major battle."

Westenbarger agreed, but both men knew they had no choice. If their plane reached the scene first, it was their duty to go down after the flyers.

"The Yorktown is sending three helicopters to the scene," the captain told Price, "but they're still a long way off."

Ten minutes later the amphibian orbited two miles south of Hon Me Island, the crew searching the waters below

for some sign of Peerson and Bryant.

"Are you picking up their beeper?" Price asked.

"Roger. We hear it. They're in the area. Now, if we can just spot them."

Two Navy Skyraiders were also circling in the vicinity, flying protective cover for the downed men. In the distance Price saw the helicopters approaching from the Yorktown and, farther south, the Berkeley was heading toward Hon Me Island. It was obvious that all airborne and sea rescue units expected trouble in the rescue attempt because of the proximity of the enemy guns on the island. The only salvation would be if the two downed pilots had drifted away from the area after their parachutes opened.

"I don't see them anyplace," Pleiman called from the rear of the aircraft.

Perhaps they are further away from—" Suddenly the pararescuer stopped talking for several seconds; then he yelled, "I see them! Right below us!"

"Near the island."

"Yeah. Too close, Captain. Too close to the Reds. Look directly east of the sharp point of Hon Me."

Price looked down at the island, spotted the point of land referred to by Pleiman, and moved his eyes east. Suddenly he saw the bright orange raft, barely the size of a penny from altitude. "Mighty close to those guns," he muttered. "Mighty close."

Westenbarger spotted the downed Air Force pilot about the same time and made the only decision possible. "Pilot to crew—going down. Jettisoning external fuel tanks now."

"Roger."

"We won't have much time," he continued. "Pleiman, as soon as we touch down, go out the hatch. The others will give you a hand. Price, have you seen any gunfire from the island yet?"

"Not one burst," the navigator said, searching the dot of land in the Gulf of Tonkin with his glasses. "According to Intelligence the Reds have the island packed with guns, but so far it appears that S-2 might be wrong."

"I hope so."

Price continued to watch Hon Me Island as pilot Westenbarger eased the Albatross towards the water. When he flew close to the island, Westenbarger steepened his dive to avoid the expected enemy fire, but no shells came their way. It was as though the island was deserted. A few feet off the surface of the gulf, Westenbarger broke his glide, held the nose high, cut the throttles, and full-stalled the amphibian into the water. As soon as he brought the amphibian to a complete stop, Price began directing him to the downed jet pilot in the raft.

"He's right behind the tail section and a little to the starboard."

Still no gunfire came from the Communist-held island. Price, tense and expectant, was amazed at the lack of resistance. By the time Pleiman reached the raft, Price decided that the briefing officers had overrated the enemy capabilities. "Now as soon as we get the copilot, we can get out of here. I wonder

Seconds later the first enemy shell hit the Albatross and within five minutes two of the crew were dead, and the others were floundering in the waters of the Gulf of Tonkin. As for the amphibian, it had disappeared beneath the surface...

Price was still underwater when he opened his eyes. The navigator felt as if his lungs were about to burst. Fighting



PRICE
"Over here..."

the instinct to inhale, knowing that he would choke, the captain tried to force his way to the surface of the gulf. When he raised his arms, however, sharp pains knifed through his back. It was his first indication that he was wounded. Despite the pain, Price used his arms to propel himself up until his head finally broke through the surface and he could once again breathe.

"Help! Help!"

Price heard the plea above the steady roar of the enemy gunfire, but he was so exhausted that several seconds elapsed before he regained enough strength to turn toward the man in trouble. When he did, he saw jet pilot Pearson in his raft, only a few feet away. At the same instant oil from the amphibian, floating on the surface of the gulf, caught fire. Realizing that both he and the jet pilot would be trapped in the flames if they didn't clear the area, Price swam to the raft and started pushing it east, to the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin and away from Hon Me Island. Pearson looked at the navigator and muttered weakly, "You're wounded."

Price had already noticed that the water around him was stained red. This fact, added to the pain when he raised his arms and the burning sensation in his back, made it obvious that fragments of the same shell which had sunk the Albatross had also hit him. Wounded or not, Captain Price knew he had no alternative except to keep swimming away from the flaming oil and the enemy guns.

It was slow, arduous work for Price as he fought to keep his head above water and at the same time push the raft with the downed pilot in it. The Communists were lobbing their mortar shells at the raft in a steady stream, and as they burst and sent geysers of water skyward, the resulting waves lapped over Price's head. They also rocked the raft and threatened to dump pilot Pearson into the gulf.

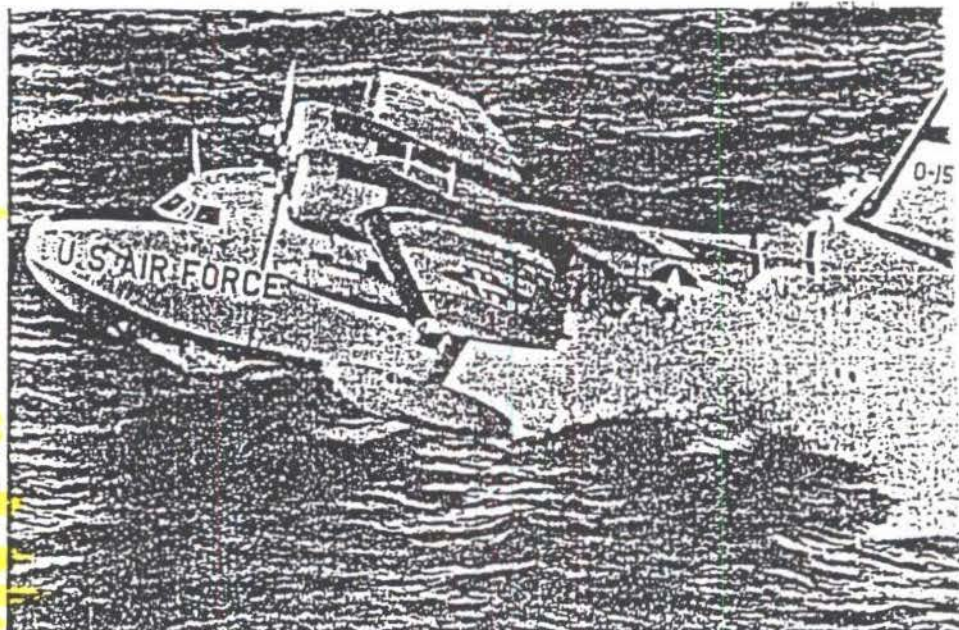
"Help! Help!"

Again Price heard someone in distress. Holding onto the raft with one hand he searched the surrounding water. Finally he saw a head bob out of the water, then disappear again. It was the flight mechanic, S/Sgt. Clyde W. Jackson, of Fort Royal, Virginia. Price knew that he had neither the strength nor the time to help Jackson. The man was too far away. At that moment, however, Price saw the co-pilot of the Albatross, William E. Hall, swimming a few yards south of the mechanic. Evidently the wind had carried the flight mechanic's plea for help away from Hall, since he wasn't even looking in Jackson's direction.

"Get that man right behind you!" Price screamed.

The co-pilot looked up, a startled expression on his face as the navigator's words reached him through the din of the exploding shells. Price saw Hall turn, spotted the bobbing head of the flight mechanic and move quickly to the man's side.

SATISFIED that Jackson was getting the aid he so desperately needed, Price turned his attention back to Pearson and the raft. He had never been so tired in his life. His eyes and face, burned by the blast of the JATO bottle, hurt. So did the shell fragments in his back, and the loss of blood, plainly evident by the red trail which marked his path in the water. His strength sapped, Price looked at the injured jet pilot in the raft; he wondered how much longer he would be able to help him.



Albatross similar to one which put Price down in Gulf of Tonkin lands in water.

Suddenly a deafening noise clogged Price's ears and he felt a heavy weight on his back, and the navigator was convinced that he was having hallucinations. He was, that is, until the weight lifted momentarily and hit him again with a resounding thump. Surprised, Price looked around behind him and couldn't believe his eyes.

"It can't be..."

It was. The throbbing noise, filling his ears along with the blasts of enemy shells, came from an SH-3 helicopter hovering directly above. The chopper's rescue sling was the "weight" on his back! Grabbing the sling, Price threw it into the raft and yelled, "Put it on... put it around you!"

Price watched the struggling jet pilot attempt to slip inside the rescue sling, but Pearson was too weak. Boosting himself up on the side of the raft, Price forced the sling over Pearson's head and motioned for the helicopter to pull up the major. An instant later Pearson was lifted from the raft and hoisted towards the door of the chopper.

A few yards away Price saw another helicopter picking up the remainder of the Albatross crew and the other jet pilot. Holding onto the side of the small raft that Pearson had been in, Price felt better despite the heavy gunfire still directed at him from the island. As soon as the chopper lowered the sling and picked him up, they could clear the scene and get back to the nearby carrier. It seemed to Price that he had been in the water for hours.

"Here! ... Over here!"

The captain heard the voice and recognized it instantly. He spotted Sergeant Jackson a few yards away, alone and floundering in the water. Later, Price learned that co-pilot Hall had tried to carry the chopper rescue sling over to the flight mechanic, but before he reached Jackson the whirlybird crew had hoisted Hall out of the water, leaving the crewman behind.

"Hold on, Jackson... I'll get you."

Price hated to leave the raft, but he had no choice. He swam to the injured Jackson, slipped an arm around him and started to dog-paddle back to the raft. At that moment he spotted the SH-3 heading toward them and he stopped. He watched the rescue sling swoop down, made a desperate grab as it started past, and snagged it.

"Get this on, Jackson," Price said.

Quickly he put the injured, exhausted flight mechanic in the sling, and before he could even wave, the chopper crew was pulling Jackson out of the water. Price saw several bullets penetrate the side of the helicopter but it remained airborne, pivoting in the sky as only a chopper can and head for a nearby ship.

Captain Price was now alone in the water. All the others, except the two dead crewmen, had been picked up. For a few minutes the navigator thought that it was only a matter of time until he, too, would be hoisted to safety... But as the two rescue helicopters disappeared from the scene he began to wonder. He saw them touch down on the ships, but they didn't take off again. Had he been forgotten? Was it possible that he had been given up for dead, too? One man in the Gulf of Tonkin was almost indiscernible to the human eye. Perhaps in the confusion of the rescue attempt there had been a miscount. Certainly after a head count was taken the rescuers would learn that he was unaccounted for, but by then it would be too late. Much too late.

Using nearly all his remaining strength Price climbed into Pearson's raft, only to discover that he was drifting dangerously close to the shore of Hon Me Island. Wearily he slid back into the water and started swimming toward the open sea, dragging the raft behind him. Exhausted, bleeding, discouraged, he still refused to give up. He was determined to keep trying—until he blacked out or was hit by one of the Red shells.

Suddenly the entire sky seemed to explode. Two Air Force F-4s roared across the Gulf of Tonkin at wave-top level, firing their rockets and machine guns at the enemy gunners on the island. Two junks that were heading in Price's direction suddenly burst into flames and sank. A Skyraider followed the jets and bombed the beach. Smoke and debris flew skyward and the concussion even jolted Price in the water.

"They didn't forget me," he muttered, fighting to keep his head above water.

A minute later Price saw a small UH-2 helicopter flying slowly through the curtain of fire towards him, a rescue sling dangling behind. The chopper came lumbering in, oblivious of the enemy shells. The rescue collar dropped only a few feet (Continued on page 74)

DET 1-3-13-25 Feb

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(C) USAF RB-66 was reported down in the Gulf of Tonkin south of 1700N. HU-16 located one survivor and while descending to make the pick-up spotted several others in the area. The HU-16 advised that several different men were in sight and requested that USN helicopter should make pick-up so he could mark location of survivors he had spotted. The team work on this operation resulted in five of the six crew members recovered. The sixth man had not been confirmed successfully leaving the aircraft.

DET 1-3-14-1 Mar

(C) USN F-4B reported missing in the Gulf of Tonkin. HU-16, fighter aircraft and Navy Destroyers were diverted to the area. Area with a radius of 60 miles of the last known position was searched but negative leads were obtained. USN requested mission be suspended.

DET 1-3-15-1 Mar

(C) USN A-4E reported down in North Vietnam. All rescue aircraft on the scene reported heavy ground fire from the immediate area of the suspected downed man. Numerous junks near the area and heavy ground fire left little doubt that the pilot had been captured if he got out of the aircraft safely.

DET 1-3-16-9 Mar

(C) USN F-4C was downed by ground fire in the Gulf of Tonkin two miles off the coast of North Vietnam. An HU-16 landed and was in the process of making a pick-up when it took a direct hit from mortar fired off the coast. The HU-16 caught fire and sank almost immediately. Two crew members were reported killed by the mortar and the remaining four evacuated the aircraft. USN helicopters recovered the two Navy pilots and four of the HU-16 crew members. Destroyers and fighters in the area reported ground fire from shore imple-ments was extremely heavy and accurate.

DET 1-3-19-20 Mar

(C) USN F-4B crashed in the Gulf of Tonkin. Two good chutes were observed. One chute landed 75 yards of the coast of North Vietnam and the pilot was reported captured. The second chute landed 1000 yards off the coast and the man was recovered by USN helicopter.

DET 1-3-20-24 Mar

(C) Pilot of USAF F-105 went down off the coast of North Vietnam. Wingman reported negative chute sighting and that the aircraft went down in the vicinity of numerous junks. Heavy ground fire from the shore was reported. Mission was suspended.

DET 2-3-2-11 Jan

(U) USAF F-105 pilot ejected over Laos. A good chute was sighted and voice contact with the downed pilot was established. HH-3 made a hoist pick-up of the pilot who was in good condition. A1E and F-105 were used to suppress ground fire.

DET 2-3-3-16 Jan

(U) USAF F-4C crew ejected over Laos. Voice contact was established with one of the pilots. Hoist pick-up was made on this man. Trees in the area were 150 to 200 feet high. HH-3 circled the area in an attempt to make visual contact with the second crewman. Contact was made and he was recovered 10 minutes later.

7 ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED

CONFLICTING
DATES
9 MAR
✓
14 MAR

Rescue in the Gulf of Tonkin

Burned and wounded, HU-16 navigator Don Price saved the injured F-4 pilot, then found himself alone in the sea, surrounded by enemy sampans.

BY JOHN L. FRISBEE
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

IT WAS late in the afternoon of November 14, 1966. For several hours, the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service HU-16B had been boring holes in the sky over the Gulf of Tonkin, some 200 miles north of the DMZ. Capt. Donald S. Price, navigator of the Grumman amphibian, was a veteran of 150 missions in SEA since he reported for duty with the 33d Air Rescue Squadron at Naha AB, Okinawa, in October 1964.

The lulling drone of throttled-back engines was interrupted by a call to action. A flak-damaged F-4 was heading for the Gulf where Maj. James Peerson and his backseater, Capt. Lynwood Bryant, hoped to eject southeast of Thanh Hoa. Price's pilot, Capt. David Westerbarger, headed north with throttles firewalled, touching down on a choppy sea near Major Peerson, who was closest to shore.

As pararescueman A1C James Pleiman jumped into the water to help Peerson, artillery and some twenty-five motorized sampans opened fire, bracketing the HU-16 as it floated about two miles offshore. Captain Price, after computing a departure heading, ran to the rear of the aircraft to help SSgt. Clyde Jackson pull Pleiman and the downed pilot to the aircraft with a rope attached to the pararescueman.

Seeing that A1C Robert Hilton was having trouble with his M-16, Price ordered the airman to help

Jackson. Grabbing Hilton's M-16, Price began firing at the approaching sampans. The F-4 pilot was halfway into the aircraft when the world went black. An artillery shell had scored a direct hit on the HU-16, setting it afire. Price was thrown against a bulkhead, stunned and bleeding from shrapnel wounds on his head, back, and buttocks and burned by the explosion.

When the haze lifted, Captain Price saw Hilton lying dead on the floor. Sergeant Jackson had been blown out the door, one arm nearly severed. The pararescueman, Pleiman, floated facedown in the water. Near his body, Major Peerson, injured and without a life jacket, struggled to keep his head above water. The HU-16 pilot and his copilot, Lt. Walter Hall, had managed to escape through an overhead hatch, leaving the burning amphibian afloat on a sheet of flame.

Still groggy and bleeding heavily, Captain Price sized up the situation and immediately went to Peerson's aid. Fully clothed and supporting a man nearly twice his weight, Don Price called on all his training as a competitive swimmer and water safety instructor. Pushing the burning gasoline aside with his hands, he towed Peerson 200 yards to temporary safety.

Resting a moment, Price looked up. A Navy helicopter hovered overhead. Price, pummeled by the chopper's downwash, helped Major

Peerson into the hoist. As the F-4 pilot was hauled aboard, an artillery shell hit ten yards from Price, another thirty yards away, and automatic weapons fire from the sampans churned the water. The chopper, leaking fuel from several hits, pulled out while another Navy helicopter picked up the remaining survivors, leaving Price alone on an unfriendly sea.

A hundred and fifty yards away an empty liferaft bobbed on the waves. Barely able to move his legs, Captain Price swam to the raft. The prospect before him wasn't promising. About 400 yards out were several sampans, intent on taking him prisoner. Each time one started to edge in, an A-1 or an F-4 came down, guns blazing. Price remembers seeing a sampan cut in half by cannon fire. That was heartening, but on the other hand, he was drifting toward shore. Once more he slipped into the water and, towing the raft, swam out to sea, his waning strength rekindled by thoughts of his wife and two children back at Naha.

When he could swim no longer, Price—shaking from cold and fatigue—pulled himself painfully back into the raft. There was no response to his calls on the survival radio. Then, after what seemed an eternity, a Navy UH-2B came in low and fast, hovered over the raft, and picked him out of the Gulf. After he received emergency medical treatment aboard a nearby utility ship, doctors on the carrier *Yorktown* spent four hours removing shrapnel and sewing up his wounds. It had been an ordeal of heroism and endurance that few men could have survived.

Don Price, now a retired lieutenant colonel, flew thirty more missions before returning to the States, wearing the Air Force Cross. He is one of only three Air Force navigators who served in Southeast Asia to be awarded the nation's second highest decoration for valor. ■



Navigator Don Price won the Air Force Cross for valor in Vietnam.

away from the aircraft. He then discovered that a crew member was injured and could not be moved. Capt. Collins refused to abandon the aircraft for a more favorable defensive position. Instead, he established a perimeter defense of the downed AC-47 until rescue helicopters arrived.

Although under heavy attack, Capt. Collins continuously fought off the Viet Cong, enabling three of his crew members to be rescued. The valuable minutes he gave his crew cost him his life.

DARING RESCUE

Capt. Donald S. Price almost gave his life in a daring rescue of a F-4C *Phantom* crew.

He was a navigator aboard a HU-16 *Albatross* on a rescue mission in the Gulf of Tonkin, offshore of North Vietnam on March 14, 1966.

As the HU-16 approached the area, the downed crew members were sighted in the water. Approximately 25 motorized sampans were also heading toward the pilots.

After a full stall landing, they maneuvered toward the nearest survivor. Moments later, the sampans opened up with a heavy barrage of gunfire. The HU-16 exploded and was immediately engulfed in flames, forcing the crew to abandon the aircraft.

Capt. Price jumped into the water and immediately swam to the F-4C pilot who had discarded his life raft and jacket and was struggling to remain afloat. Capt. Price towed the pilot away from his burning aircraft.

Minutes later, helicopters arrived on the scene and Capt. Price, although in great pain from multiple wounds, assisted the pilot into the helicopter sling.

Capt. Price was now alone. As he was struggling into a raft, the sampans were moving toward him. He jumped back into the ocean and began swimming seaward. Minutes later, two F-4C aircraft and a helicopter spotted him. While the *Phantoms* held off the sampans, the helicopter pulled Capt. Price to safety.

AWARDED TWO A. F. CROSSES

Only one airman has received the Air Force Cross twice. And that is Maj. Leland T. Kennedy, a HH-3E *Jolly Green Giant* pilot.

On Oct. 5, 1966, Maj. Kennedy and Capt. Oliver E. O'Mara and their helicopter crews



Captain Delbert W. Fleener receives the Air Force Cross from General Hunter Harris, former Pacific Air Forces commander. He was awarded the nation's second highest award for bravery following his actions while serving in Southeast Asia as a forward air controller (FAC).

flew into North Vietnam to search for a two-man crew of a downed F-4C *Phantom* jet.

The flyers were located near the Black River, which stretches across North Vietnam. Under heavy gunfire, Maj. Kennedy and his badly damaged helicopter picked up the co-pilot. Capt. O'Mara attempted to reach the pilot, but was forced to withdraw after his helicopter was chopped up by gunfire.

Both Maj. Kennedy and Capt. O'Mara received the Air Force Cross for this rescue mission into the heart of North Vietnam.

Two weeks later Maj. Kennedy earned his second Air Force Cross when he and his crew flew through heavy ground fire to rescue the two-man crew of a downed *Phantom* and the four-man crew of another rescue helicopter shot down attempting to save the F-4C pilots.

Many others have won the Air Force Cross. Some of these men are Lieutenant Colonel James R. Hopkins, Majors William M. McAllister,* Carl B. Mitchell,* William P. Robinson, Robert F. Ronca,* Peter Tsouprake, and Wayne N. Whatley; Captains Howard R. Cody,* Walter F. Draeger Jr.,* Delbert W. Fleener, Vincent J. Hickman,* Richard A. Nagel Jr., Bernard F. Lukasik,* William R. Martin,* Larry B. Mason, Jack W. Weatherby,* and Richard L. Whitesides;* 1st Lieutenants Atis K. Lielmanis* and Duane W. Martin.*

The Air Force Cross is a medal for heroes. Air Force heroes!

*Indicates recipient is deceased.

33rd ARRS Captain Decorated for Valor

Capt. Donald S. Price, of the 33rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Sq., was awarded the Air Force Cross Tuesday in a presentation ceremony at the theatre.

Lt. Gen. Joseph H. Moore, vice commander-in-chief, PACAF, made the presentation to Captain Price and also presented the Silver Star to Capt. David Westenbarger. Captain Price is one of five persons who have lived to receive the Air Force Cross and is the only Air Force navigator to ever be presented that decoration.

For his courage in saving the life of a downed Air Force pilot, he was awarded the nation's second highest award for valor. The remainder of the Albatross crew will receive the Silver Star for this mission. They were Capt. Westenbarger, 1st Lt. Walter Hall, SSgt. Clyde Jackson, A1C James Pleiman (Posthumous), and A1C Robert Hilton (Posthumous).

General Moore, who was Commander of the 2nd Air Division, Vietnam when the rescue mission took place, also presented the Air Force Flying Safety Award to the 21st Troop Carrier Sq. During his brief visit here, General Moore was given a tour of the base and a briefing at Wing headquarters.

Captain Price, whose hometown is Moorestown, N.J., attended Bradley University, majoring in Civil Engineering. During his college tenure, he worked as an assistant engineer in Peoria, Ill.

He entered the Air Force as an aviation cadet in 1960, was commissioned in 1961 at Harlingen AFB, Tex. as a navigator. In June of 1962, he completed navigator bombardier training school at Mather AFB, Calif. and was subsequently assigned to the 28th Air Transport Sq., Hill AFB, Utah where he flew on C-124's for two years.

After attending the Aircrew Survival School at Stead AFB,

Nev. and the HU-16 transition training unit at Eglin AFB, Fla., he was assigned to the 33rd ARRS at Naha. He flew 90 combat search rescue missions in Southeast Asia until he was wounded by an artillery round which sank his aircraft in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Among Captain Price's decorations are the Distinguished Flying Cross with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Air Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters, the Purple Heart, and the Vietnam Service Medal.

He is married to the former Maureen Bartula and they have two sons; Donald, 3, and Dennis, 2.

Schedule Monthly Exercise

As mentioned in last week's Outpost monthly shelter exercises will be conducted on Naha AB; all personnel on the base, including dependents and civilian employees must participate. There are two exceptions: School children will not be curtailed.

The purpose of the exercises includes making personnel familiar with the procedures involved with a base wide shelter operation. Familiarity, in this case, gives more confidence, safety, and protection to all personnel.

A few times each year Naha AB will be evaluated by higher headquarters on shelter procedures and knowledge, including dependent and civilian employees participation. Therefore, your sincere cooperation is necessary to help insure an

(Cont. on P-4, C-1)

Adapted from news releases issued by Seventh Air Force and Pacific Air Forces writers



Maj. H. Lewis Smith (right) talks with rescue pilots who brought him out of North Vietnam jungle after his A-1E Skyraider was forced down.

RESCUE crews flying helicopter and amphibious aircraft had made more than 560 "saves" of downed airmen or ground troops, in both North and South Vietnam, before the end of 1966.

The majority of these dramatic, action-packed rescues were under enemy fire, which makes them all the more spectacular. Nearly all of them, whether flown by helicopter or amphibious crews, involved great personal effort and risk of life.

Many involved joint operations by Air Force rescue crews and the ships, helicopters and aircraft of the US Army, Navy, and Republic of Vietnam military services. In fact, joint air rescue activities by Air Force and Navy units had resulted in saving 229 downed pilots from the Gulf of Tonkin, as of November 1966, the Department of Defense noted.

Obviously, personal risks are great for aircrew members involved in the rescue operations throughout Vietnam. And seldom, if ever, is any mention made of what might be termed the battle of "guts." Every airman who flies search and rescue missions faces this personal problem and comes to grips with his natural fears in his own, personal way.

There surely has to be something heart-pounding about hovering over a downed airman or soldier, or being lowered to the ground on a cable to assist a complete stranger in a hostile environment that is alive with the sound of enemy rifle and machine gun fire. To learn to live with this insidious, natural fear—and make a successful rescue—is undoubtedly as great a personal victory as it is a shared one.

In short, the job takes guts, and there has certainly been no shortage of courage among American rescue personnel operating in Southeast Asia. Two ARRS men have won the Air Force Cross for their bravery. One of these medals was given posthumously, to AIC William H. Pitsenbarger, a pararescue medic.

VIGNETTES



Pararescuemen A1C Robert D. Bowers and A1C Franklin D. Stevenson spent two hours on ground in North Vietnam after rescuing two recon pilots.

Capt. Donald S. Price, a father of three and coach of a junior swim team at Naha AB, Okinawa, received the Air Force Cross last September for a dramatic rescue in the Gulf of Tonkin in which he nearly lost his life while saving another.

Tragedy And Heroism

On March 14, 1966, Captain Price, a navigator, and his fellow aircrew members were orbiting over the Gulf of Tonkin in their HU-16 *Albatross*. The crew was on temporary duty in Southeast Asia from Okinawa.

When the distress call came over their radio it began a series of events from which two men did not return. The mayday came from a fighter pilot, reporting the ejection of two fellow F-4 pilots over the gulf, and gave their approximate position.

Capt. David Westenbarger, the HU-16's pilot, turned his *Albatross* north toward the downed aviators. En route, he called one of the nearby Search and Rescue (SAR) destroyers and requested two helicopters be

pilot into its sling. When he looked around again, only he and the flight mechanic remained in the water. The other helicopter had pulled the copilot aboard before he could tow the sling to the mechanic. Then a helicopter returned and retrieved the airman. A Navy *Sky-raider* was making passes at the beach to draw fire away from the rescue scene. Another helicopter took a hit in its fuel line and was forced to return to its ship.

Alone in the sea, Captain Price swam slowly and painfully for the empty raft nearby. He climbed in, but found the raft was drifting toward shore and the enemy guns, so he got out and swam seaward, towing the raft behind him.

He started to shake, so he got back in the raft and opened his survival radio. He heard the A-1 pilot calling for more air strikes. Two Air Force F-4Cs arrived and started blasting shore batteries and the enemy junks which were approaching Captain Price. They blew one out of the water close enough to the navigator that the concussion raised him out of the water.

The HU-16 had sunk. Captain Price recalled the action which followed:

"I began to shake violently all over for periods of 20 to 30 seconds. I called the Rescap but they didn't answer. I called for anyone who could read me, but still no answer. Then I spotted a chopper coming in low from the northeast."

Captain Price was lifted out of his raft into the helicopter. Inside, he stretched out on his stomach. A flight crewman tore his flight suit away and put gauze compresses on Captain Price's wounds. He was still shaking violently. Two other aircrew men took off their own flight suits and covered him.

Within minutes he was aboard an aircraft carrier, where Navy doctors picked out pieces of shrapnel and stitched his wounds. They couldn't get all the shrapnel, so Captain Price figures he'll be able to predict the weather occasionally. Within two weeks from March 14, 1966, he was back on duty with his outfit in Okinawa. He was later awarded the Air Force Cross.

And, somewhere in the Air Force, an F-4C pilot thanks God for rescuemen like Don Price.

Other Rescue Efforts

Paramedics A2C Robert D. Bowers and A2C Franklin D. Stevson spent nearly two hours in dense undergrowth near a North Vietnamese village before being rescued by a helicopter.

On a rescue mission to recover two RF-4C pilots, Airman Bowers' HH-3E helicopter was forced to leave him on the ground after he had assisted one of the injured pilots into the litter for hoisting aboard the hovering craft.

Hearing automatic fire nearby, Bowers hid in the brush. Then Airman Stevson was lowered to the ground

to search for him. He was almost immediately pinned down by enemy small arms fire and his helicopter was also forced to withdraw. Stevson contacted A-1E *Sky-raiders* in the area and gave directions for an air strike.

Then a third "Jolly Green Giant" helicopter entered the operation and picked up both of the paramedics.

An adviser to the VNAF's 213th Helicopter Squadron, Capt. Paul H. Schnucker, and a Vietnamese lieutenant flew a helicopter into an area near Dong Ha in a medical evacuation mission. Two Marine Corps choppers had already gone down on the mission.

"We were hit when about 50 feet in the air," Captain Schnucker said later. A Vietnamese soldier on board the helicopter was hit in the shoulder and leg, so the crew took him back to the Dong Ha dispensary for medical care. Their oil lines had been damaged, so they switched helicopters.

Going back into the mission area, Captain Schnucker and his VNAF crew took several more rounds in a fuel section, but managed to load 13 casualties aboard and complete the evacuation mission. They went back to the area a third time and evacuated 10 more casualties, then had to abandon their aircraft because it was leaking fuel.

Capt. David W. Haines, 1961 graduate of the Air Force Academy, landed his HU-16 *Albatross* in the South China Sea, close to a Viet Cong-held shoreline, to rescue a downed Vietnamese airman. His HU-16 rescue crew ignored bursting mortar shells raining down around them, and evacuated the VNAF pilot to Da Nang Air Base.

A veteran combat pilot and vice commander of the 12th Tactical Fighter Wing in Vietnam recently compared his own World War II rescue to current rescue operations.

Col. Joel D. Thorvaldson, now an F-4C pilot, was shot down over New Guinea in 1943. "I had to float down river for nine days, even though I was spotted by an observation plane, before I could be rescued. We didn't have choppers then."

Commenting on the dramatic recent rescue of a downed F-105 pilot in North Vietnam—which took 22 minutes—Colonel Thorvaldson said, "During World War II the pilot would have been captured, or might have waited several days and traveled many miles on foot before being picked up."

Colonel Thorvaldson flew 186 combat missions during World War II (he downed three *Zeros* and was credited with six "probables"), and flew 59 combat missions over Korea. He is now flying missions in Vietnam.

These few examples of Air Rescue and Recovery Service's daring and bravery under fire in Vietnam barely begin to tell the dramatic story of combat rescue. *THE AIRMAN* joins aviators everywhere in saluting the men of ARRS for their heroism and life-saving operations.

—J.A.G.

"We won't have much time," he continued. "Pleiman, as soon as we touch down, go out the hatch. The others will give you a hand. Price, have you seen any gunfire from the island yet?"

"Not one burst," the navigator said, searching the dot of land in the Gulf of Tonkin with his glasses. "According to Intelligence the Reds have the island packed with guns, but so far it appears that S-2 might be wrong."

"I hope so."

Price continued to watch Hon Me Island as pilot Westenbarger eased the Albatross towards the water. When he flew close to the island, Westenbarger steepened his dive to avoid the expected enemy fire, but no shells came their way. It was as though the island was deserted. A few feet off the surface of the gulf, Westenbarger broke his glide, held the nose high, cut the throttles, and full-stalled the amphibian into the water. As soon as he brought the amphibian to a complete stop, Price began directing him to the downed jet pilot in the raft.

"He's right behind the tail section and a little to the starboard."

Still no gunfire came from the Communist-held island. Price, tense and expectant, was amazed at the lack of resistance. By the time Pleiman reached the raft, Price decided that the briefing officers had overrated the enemy capabilities. "Now as soon as we get the co-pilot, we can get out of here. I wonder . . ."

Seconds later the first enemy shell hit the Albatross and within five minutes two of the crew were dead, and the others were floundering in the waters of the Gulf of Tonkin. As for the amphibian, it had disappeared beneath the surface . . .

Price was still underwater when he opened his eyes. The navigator felt as if his lungs were about to burst. Fighting

the instinct to inhale, knowing that he would choke, the captain tried to force his way to the surface of the gulf. When he raised his arms, however, sharp pains knifed through his back. It was his first indication that he was wounded. Despite the pain, Price used his arms to propel himself up until his head finally broke through the surface and he could once again breathe.

"Help! Help!"

Price heard the plea above the steady roar of the enemy gunfire, but he was so exhausted that several seconds elapsed before he regained enough strength to turn toward the man in trouble. When he did, he saw jet pilot Pearson in his raft, only a few feet away. At the same instant oil from the amphibian, floating on the surface of the gulf, caught fire. Realizing that both he and the jet pilot would be trapped in the flames if they didn't clear the area, Price swam to the raft and started pushing it east, to the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin and away from Hon Me Island. Pearson looked at the navigator and muttered weakly, "You're wounded."

Price had already noticed that the water around him was stained red. This fact, added to the pain when he raised his arms and the burning sensation in his back, made it obvious that fragments of the same shell which had sunk the Albatross had also hit him. Wounded or not, Captain Price knew he had no alternative except to keep swimming away from the flaming oil and the enemy guns.

It was slow, arduous work for Price as he fought to keep his head above water and at the same time push the raft with the downed pilot in it. The Communists were lobbing their mortar shells at the raft in a steady stream, and as they burst and sent geysers of water skyward, the resulting waves lapped over Price's head. They also rocked the raft and threatened to dump pilot Pearson into the gulf.

"Help! Help!"

Again Price heard someone in distress. Holding onto the raft with one hand he searched the surrounding water. Finally he saw a head bob out of the water, then disappear again. It was the flight mechanic, S/Sgt. Clyde W. Jackson, of Fort Royal, Virginia. Price knew that he had neither the strength nor the time to help Jackson. The man was too far away. At that moment, however, Price saw the co-pilot of the Albatross, William E. Hall, swimming a few yards south of the mechanic. Evidently the wind had carried the flight mechanic's plea for help away from Hall, since he wasn't even looking in Jackson's direction.

"Get that man right behind you!" Price screamed.

The co-pilot looked up, a startled expression on his face as the navigator's words reached him through the din of the exploding shells. Price saw Hall turn, spotted the bobbing head of the flight mechanic and move quickly to the man's side.

SATISFIED that Jackson was getting the aid he so desperately needed, Price turned his attention back to Peerson and the raft. He had never been so tired in his life. His eyes and face, burned by the blast of the JATO bottle, hurt. So did the shell fragments in his back, and the loss of blood, plainly evident by the red trail which marked his path in the water. His strength sapped, Price looked at the injured jet pilot in the raft; he wondered how much longer he would be able to help him.

Suddenly a deafening noise clogged Price's ears and he felt a heavy weight on his back, and the navigator was convinced that he was having hallucinations. He was, that is, until the weight lifted momentarily and hit him again with a resounding thump. Surprised, Price looked around behind him and couldn't believe his eyes.

"It can't be..."

It was. The throbbing noise, filling his ears along with the blasts of enemy shells, came from an SH-3 helicopter hovering directly above. The chopper's rescue sling was the "weight" on his back! Grabbing the sling, Price threw it into the raft and yelled, "Put it on... put it around you!"

Price watched the struggling jet pilot attempt to slip inside the rescue sling, but Peerson was too weak. Boosting himself up on the side of the raft, Price forced the sling over Peerson's head and motioned for the helicopter to pull up the major. An instant later Peerson was lifted from the raft and hoisted towards the door of the chopper.

A few yards away Price saw another helicopter picking up the remainder of the Albatross crew and the other jet pilot. Holding onto the side of the small raft that Peerson had been in, Price felt better despite the heavy gunfire still directed at him from the island. As soon as the chopper lowered the sling and picked him up, they could clear the scene and get back to the nearby carrier. It seemed to Price that he had been in the water for hours.

"Here! . . . Over here!"

The captain heard the voice and recognized it instantly. He spotted Sergeant Jackson a few yards away, alone and floundering in the water. Later, Price learned that co-pilot Hall had tried to carry the chopper rescue sling over to the flight mechanic, but before he reached Jackson the whirlybird crew had hoisted Hall out of the water, leaving the crewman behind.

"Hold on, Jackson... I'll get you."

Price hated to leave the raft, but he had no choice. He swam to the injured Jackson, slipped an arm around him and started to dog-paddle back to the raft. At that moment he spotted the SH-3 heading toward them and he stopped. He watched the rescue sling swoop down, made a desperate grab as it started past, and snagged it.

"Get this on, Jackson," Price said.

Quickly he put the injured, exhausted flight mechanic in the sling, and before he could even wave, the chopper crew was pulling Jackson out of the water. Price saw several bullets penetrate the side of the helicopter but it remained airborne, pivoting in the sky as only a chopper can and head for a nearby ship.

Captain Price was now alone in the water. All the others, except the two dead crewmen, had been picked up. For a few minutes the navigator thought that it was only a matter of time until he, too, would be hoisted to safety... But as the two rescue helicopters disappeared from the scene he began to wonder. He saw them touch down on the ships, but they didn't take off again. Had he been forgotten? Was it possible that he had been given up for dead, too? One man in the Gulf of Tonkin was almost indiscernible to the human eye. Perhaps in the confusion of the rescue attempt there had been a miscount. Certainly after a head count was taken the rescuers would learn that he was unaccounted for, but by then it would be too late. Much too late.

Using nearly all his remaining strength Price climbed into Peerson's raft, only to discover that he was drifting dangerously close to the shore of Hon Me Island. Warily he slid back into the water and started swimming toward the open sea, dragging the raft behind him. Exhausted, bleeding, discouraged, he still refused to give up. He was determined to keep trying—until he blacked out or was hit by one of the Red shells.

Suddenly the entire sky seemed to explode. Two Air Force F-4s roared across the Gulf of Tonkin at wave-top level, firing their rockets and machine guns at the enemy gunners on the island. Two junks that were heading in Price's direction suddenly burst into flames and sank. A Skyraider followed the jets and bombed the beach. Smoke and debris flew skyward and the concussion even jolted Price in the water.

"They didn't forget me," he muttered, fighting to keep his head above water.

A minute later Price saw a small UH-2 helicopter flying slowly through the curtain of fire towards him, a rescue sling dangling behind. The chopper came lumbering in, oblivious of the enemy shells. The rescue collar dropped only a few feet (Continued on page 74)