

Rotor Wash

PJ Pickup!

Woody Kimsey

A long, long time ago, 22 April 1966 in a place far, far away, just North East off Tchphone, Laos a US Marine F-4B was shot down. We, two HH-3E Jolly Greens, scrambled out of Nakhom Phnom, Thailand with two HH-3Es and four A1-E escort Sandy fighters. Low bird was Maj Ray Matthews, CP Capt Larry Rice, FE SSgt Bernard (Mouse) Loughtry, and PJ SSgt George Hunt. High bird was me, 1st. LT Woody Kimsey, CP Capt Fran Henderickson, FE SSgt Don Chance and PJ SSgt Bob Berry. The Sandys found the area and directed the low bird in to the front seater and made the pickup under fire. They immediately moved over to pick up the backseater who was injured and required help. As their PJ George Hunt reached the jungle floor they received heavy ground fire and the FE, Mouse Loughtry who was running the hoist, was shot just above his left clavicle. Ray severed the hoist cable and exited the area with a wounded FE and a PJ on the ground. Now we were the Low bird, we immediately tried to get the backseater but were driven off by ground fire. We finally got low on fuel and exited the area to the East toward Northern South Viet Nam in search of fuel. We finally landed at Kae Sanh to get fuel, the Marines threw a refueling hose over the concertina wire and we refueled. While there a Marine full colonel asked our FE if they could help and of course we said yes. He sent two Marine Huey gunships with us and we went back into Laos to try to get the backseater and our PJ back. The Sandys again led the way and we tried again. The Marine gunships were immediately hit with ground fire which hit one of them in the driveshaft and they had to withdraw. Now we had no backup. Finally a Navy H-3B, Big Mother, arrived. The Sandys found the backseater and we went into a hover under fire and retrieved the backseater who was severely injured and had a broken leg but still got on the hoist unassisted. We asked him if he had seen our PJ and he said negative. We immediately headed East to nearest base where we could get medical assistance for our survivor. We landed at and just so happened to have a USAF Special Operations H-3 there. I asked if they would take him to medical help and they said there was a hospital ship just off shore of Da Nang and they would take him there. We transferred him and immediately returned to the shoot down area because we still had PJ George Hunt on the ground. The area was still hot and we had no sign of Hunt. Due to fuel and pending nightfall we and the Sandys returned to NKP.

The next morning we were really the low bird and gained a high bird, Skip Cowell and crew. We launched an entire SAR Force before dawn and just after dawn the Sandys found a red panel on the ground in a small clearing. With no voice or beeper from the site we decided to try it. I punched off the tip tanks and went in under fire again and recovered Hunt. He said he broke both of his survival radios and had been stepped on all night by Viet Minh that were looking for him made more difficult by the Blind Bat C-130 dropping flares for fighter night strikes. We returned to NKP with one happy PJ!