

NARRATIVE - RESCUE MISSION - RECOVERING CASUALTIES FROM "C"
Company, 2nd Battalion 16th Infantry., 1st Infantry Division, by SSgt David E Milsten

The mission started around 3 p.m. on the 11th of April. My bird, was on primary and Pits' was on backup. A company of 1st Division troopers had been hit by light sniper fire and then got caught by some support artillery when they called in the heavy stuff to eliminate the snipers. Altogether, they had 9 or 10 critically wounded litter cases and around 16 ambulatory cases. They were in heavy jungle with the trees topping out at around 175-200 feet, and the nearest clearing for a helicopter landing was around 4 miles away. Our birds are the only ones in this whole area with hoists, so 38th ARRS sent us out to get them.

My bird went in for the 1st load. We were able to drop down in a small hole to around 100 feet from the ground. We made one stokes litter pickup and then moved away to allow the backup bird to go in. While they made the 2nd litter pickup. I transferred the guy we had in the stokes to a folding litter. Then we dropped back into the hole for another litter pickup. Two guys made a full load for us and for some reason Pits elected to pick up just the one, so both our birds flew to a small airstrip located around 8 miles from the hole. The strip was called Binh Ba and was located around 20 miles NNE of Vung Tau, on the coast.

We unloaded our patients at a small receiving hospital there. We then decided that during the next pickups to send both PJs down. They could start the Army out on our chain saws, and try to get an area cut out big enough to land in. Past experience (this was our 20th operation like this since last October) has also showed us that the loading process is much faster with a PJ on the ground, to help organize things. We can only make 2 litter pickups per flight using our Stokes litters. But, if the less severely wounded are capable of riding the penetrator up we can get 4-5 a flight. Normal procedure is to

go into an orbit nearby. The army set off a few dynamite blasts at the pickup point to clear trees for an LZ and then they decided to send in an Army CH47 Chinook first. It couldn't get in because of its size, so then the army called in our 43's.

They went in and managed to go all of the way down. O'Beirne loaded 3 critically wounded on and then had to stay on the ground while they flew the wounded out. UH-1's started coming in to help carry out the wounded, and a CH47 finally made it in too. A USA captain told O'Beirne that Pits had got it the night before and showed him, where Pits was laying. Up until this time we all thought that Pits was OK. We received a false report from the Army after the VC had been pushed away the night before that they had moved to a different spot and that Pits was still OK. O'Beirne got busy helping evacuate the wounded. In fact he pretty well ran the show since most of the Army guys were just standing around like they were lost. O'Beirne would locate a wounded trooper, call for stretcher bearers to carry him to the choppers, and got every one else busy looking for wounded and carrying them out.

After 30-40 minutes, they had all of the wounded out and our bird picked up O'Beirne and returned to Bien Hoa with the bad word about Pits.

They flew two wounded over to the 93rd Field Hospital- near here, and as it turned out both of them (a Lt. and a SSgt) were with Pits the whole time including being right beside him -when he was hit. -The Sergeant's story goes something like this:

They were making a 3 company push, staying fairly close together, when his company started receiving sniper fire. Six of their guys were hit, so they called in support artillery to eliminate the sniper fire. The first rounds came in a little too far to one side, so they asked for a correction. Unfortunately someone corrected the wrong way a few rounds fell near the company. This is where they received their casualties and we were called in. Before they called us the area was declared "secure" again and they had a perimeter defense sit up.

He said that Pits came down the hoist and started helping them with the hoist loading, plus Pits worked on the wounded in between hoist loads. He kept on going strong up to the time that the bird received the 30 cal. fire. The fire came from pretty close, so it's my feeling that their perimeter defence was pretty thin.

At this time the sniper fire started again, in fact a few rounds had been directed at the 43 before the heavy automatics cut loose. Pits saw the bird drag the litter through the trees and take off and the litter must have remained in their sight. Pits wanted to go out and get it back since it would be needed when the birds returned, or at least when the other one came back in. The Army Lt. wouldn't let Pits take the risk of getting hit climbing up to get the litter, and he decided to move out to another location, carrying the remaining litter cases with

them. Pits was running around treating the wounded and organizing the cutting of litter poles at this time. They started out with Pits helping carry one of the litters, but only got around 20-30 yards when the VC opened up on them.

The Sgt estimated they were hit by around 300 hard core VC. They had positioned themselves in trees with 30 cal's and had at least 2 50 cal's up there somewhere too. He didn't know how many were in the trees, but they were caught in heavy fire from both above and on the ground. In his words, "The lead was flying so thick that if you stuck up your hand it would have been shot to pieces." Most of the Army troops had M14's and were firing in full automatic since they couldn't see the VC. Pits had his M16 plus his .38, but he spent most of his time at this point crawling around gathering clips of ammo from the dead and wounded and passed it around to the army troops. After doing this for awhile, he gathered up around 20 M16 clips or so and started shooting back himself. The Sgt didn't know, how long Pits was returning fire before he was hit, but did notice that Pits was one of the few firing on semi-automatic, so he figured that Pits could see a few of them. A little later he noticed that Pits wasn't moving anymore, indicating that he had been hit hard instead of being just wounded. Pits was wearing his flack vest and had a

If any of you have any questions. about this, or about SEA, drop me a line. I am usually slow at answering letters, but will put forth a max effort to answer you

Dave Milsten

SLIDE NARRATION (Slides submitted by David E. Milsten)

1. A1C William Pitsenbarger working on wounded C Co, 2nd Bn, 16 Inf, 1st Inf Div soldiers on 11 April 1966. Bill can be identified by the helicopter crewmember helmet he is wearing.
2. Wounded Company C trooper in stokes litter on the way up to Pedro 97.
3. A1C Thomas Story, Pedro 97s HM, operating the hoist while recovering the eighth casualty.
4. Pedro 97 being returned to Bien Hoa by Army CH-47.
5. Pedro 97 undergoing battle damage repairs at Det 6.
6. HH-43F HM conducting hoist operations.
7. HH-43F cabin following a stokes litter recovery mission. Note the very limited working area.
8. HH43F cockpit view. Enroute on combat rescue mission.
9. SSgt David Milsten during a crash rescue mission.
10. SSgt Milsten returning from crash rescue mission.
11. Capt Ray Murden (center), Co Pilot on Pedro 97 during 11 April 1966 mission.
12. HH-43F on Det 6 alert pad
13. Det 6 HH-43F returning from crash rescue mission with fire suppression kit (FSK).
14. Army unit with casualties identifying location with smoke flare
15. SSgt Milsten being lowered to ground to work with 173 Airborne Division casualties.
16. SSgt Milsten on ground working with casualties.
17. Wounded airborne soldier on forest penetrator.
18. Smoke flare marking pickup point. SSgt Milsten flew high cover on this mission when the recovery helicopter was hit by enemy fire while in a hover with the casualty in the stokes litter and half way up. Photo by a combat cameraman flying with my crew.
19. I'm missing slides of the HH-43 as it was hit during the pickup and of the rescue of the downed helicopter crew, but do have a 8X10 photo of the rescue (copy attached). The pilots were able to move the helicopter a short distance away and crash landed (with litter patient still

outside the aircraft). SSgt Milsten (front of litter) and A1C Fred Sanger (downed helicopter's PJ) are running toward my helicopter while Capt Porter and Capt Salem are on the run behind us. The HM (Tsgt Conner) was hit in the legs, but had already hobbled over to our helicopter on his own power.

20. The wounded trooper being treated by SSgt Milsten enroute to a field hospital. He had quite a day, being wounded in combat, rescued, shot down while being lifted to the rescue helicopter, surviving the crash landing, and getting rescued again by the cover helicopter.

21. Preparing the downed HH-43F for recovery after the area had been secured.

22. Army Ch-47 lifting the HH-43F for return to Det 6.

23. A1C Harry O'Beirne, SSgt Dave Milsten, and Dave's brother, a paratrooper with the 173rd Airborne Division. Taken shortly before Bill was killed.

24. SSgt Milsten at Det 6.

25. Pedro 73 after being returned to Det 6. Bullet hit next to Copilot's head.

26. Pedro 73. Note the hole in the Plexiglas which indicates the angle of fire.

27. Notice on Det 6's bulletin board regarding flowers for Bill.

28. Stokes litter hoist recovery.

29. Forest penetrator recovery.

30. HH-43 helicopter crew scramble.

31. Hooking the FSK to the HH-43 during a crash rescue mission.

32. HH-43 during crash rescue.

33. HH-43 crash rescue.

34. HH-43 crash rescue.

35. Det 6 crew members.

36. Moving casualty from helicopter to field hospital.

37. HH-43 making pickup.

38. The pararescue beret badge and motto.

39. The combat cameraman who took #15 through #20 photos.
40. A2C Duane Hackney, another Air Force enlisted hero.