

MAY 18

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It was Graft's 97th mission
O/E went straight in his wing
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FM: DENNIS KRAFT

Bob;

This is the mission I told you about the other day. I have tried to throw together as much of it as I remember.

We were scrambled out of NKP on the morning of 18 May 1966. We were going after a FAC that had been shot down someplace north of the DMZ. Lt Gilmartin was the AC, Maj Vavra was the Copilot, SSgt Holloway was the FE and I was the PJ. In route to the scene we were informed that the area we were going into was pretty hot. As we were approaching the area we heard that an F4 from the USS Kittyhawk had tried to go down to get a good look at the FAC airplane in order to determine whether or not the FAC pilot was alive. The F4 sustained a significant amount of battle damage and was not going to be able to make it out. The pilot was able to get the airplane over a ridge away from the action, where both crewmembers successfully ejected. The pilot came up on his radio. The weapons officer had sustained some injuries during the ejection and subsequent fall through the trees. We were receiving transmissions from him on an intermittent basis. We were diverted from the original mission to pick up the F4 crew. The Sandys went in and established the approximate location of the crewmembers. We were then directed in for the pickup. We made our first pass over the pilot, blew our tip tanks, and came around into a hover over the pilot's location. Holloway lowered the forest penetrator for the pickup. In those days the air crews were not fully trained on the use of the penetrator. The pilot just looked at it and then up at us and shrugged his shoulders. Holloway attempted some hand signals but to no avail. The pilot just wrapped himself around the penetrator and Holloway proceeded to bring him aboard in that fashion. I assisted Holloway in bringing the pilot into the helicopter and then got him seated and buckled in. I informed him that we were going after his backseater. During the recovery of the pilot we could hear some gunfire in the distance but we couldn't tell where it was coming from and we didn't sustain any hits. As I mentioned before we were getting intermittent transmissions from the backseater and were having some trouble locating him. The countryside was rugged and we were on the tree tops moving around the hills. The backseater came up on his radio and said that he heard the helicopter. Lt Gilmartin then began moving the helicopter around as we talked to him when he told us the sound was getting louder we were able to determine his approximate location. He was in sort of a box canyon and we were headed in after him. We were low and slow on the trees and approximately 100yds from him when we got opened up on. The ground fire was coming from directly below us. We took several hits. I was in the window position with my M16 (we didn't have heavier weapons in those days) looking for something to shoot at when a round came up through the floor and hit my leg and entered my arm approximately 3 inches forward of my elbow. I radioed to the pilot and told him I was hit. He asked if we should pull out. I told him that I wasn't hit that bad and felt we should continue with the pickup attempt. The bad guys had quit firing at us after we had passed over them. We located the backseater and affected the pickup. I directed Holloway in taking care of the backseater. We got him into a stokes litter and strapped him in. We had to recover to K-San to refuel. Our self sealing tanks weren't self sealing to well. I was looked at by a doctor at K-San. He informed me that I would not be going back to my unit but that I was being air lifted out to DaNang on a C-123 that was due in

at anytime. I was operated on at Charlie Med in DaNang that afternoon and air lifted out under a mortar attack the following evening.

Well that about covers everything that I remember about that particular mission. I participated in a few other ones, but they weren't quite as exciting.

Thanks
Dennis

PS some of the other PJ's that were at Udorn when I was there are:

Bill Daniels
Leroy Kelsay
Charlie Lear
Jim Watson
Harry Birtel
Laverne Kellerman (Bugs)
George Hunt
Bob Williamson (Willy)
James Poole
Chuck Hassler