

HEROES

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story is of a Medivac Mission and the subsequent shoot-down of **Pedro 74** on 6 June 1966. Additional view points are added by "Chuck Nadler" **RCC** of **Pedro 97** and (PJ) Dave Milsten.

Hal Salem (RCC Pedro 74):

At 1445 hours I was notified by 3rd **JSARC** (3rd **ARRG Joint Search & Rescue Center**) that the Army needed to evacuate 4 wounded personnel by hoist from the jungle at YS 263 905 (1047N 10705 E). (First coordinates were given as XS 263 905 heading 269 degrees from Tan Son Nhut) **Pedro 74** and **Pedro 97** were refueled immediately and were airborne at 1455L.

Bien Hoa tower coordinated with the Army and lifted the artillery southeast of **Bien Hoa** so that we didn't have to skirt around the artillery fire zone. **Pedro 74** and **97** arrived over the pick up area at 1520L. The Forward Air Controller was unable to take off from Long Thanh because of a blocked runway. Contact was made with **Gunslinger 33** (armed UH-1B escort helicopter) and also with **Damage Charlie 5** (the ground party). **MARKER SMOKE** was requested by **Pedro 74**. When the "Goofy Grape" was spotted **Pedro 74** descended to the pick up point with **Pedro 97** flying high cover, and **Gunslinger** flight circling as RESCAP. **Pedro 74** hoisted 1 seriously wounded in the "stokes" litter and had begun to lower the forest penetrator for a second pick-up.



The jungle canopy was 100 to 125 feet high with heavy jungle undergrowth. As the forest penetrator was being lowered (approximately 20 feet extended) (1525L) ground fire tore through the Plexiglas on the pilot's side and at the same time (**FE**) TSgt Cannon (hoist operator) was hit in the calf and thigh.





Chuck Nadler (RCC Pedro 97): **Pedro 74** had completed one hoist pickup using the "stokes" litter and was lowering the hoist with the forest penetrator for a second rescue when he started taking ground fire. I heard the Army FM radio say "**Get out Pedro**" and I could hear weapons fire through the radio mic. Hal said something like "We've been hit" and started to pull out of the area.

Hal Salem: The rotor RPM dropped to **230** and I immediately pulled the aircraft up and to the left away from the VC weapon fire. My (**CP**) Capt Potter, who had been operating the radio transmitted that we had been hit. Hearing the transmission, both **gunships** closed for escort. **Pedro 97** simultaneously began descending to aid in case **74** went down.

Chuck Nadler: I made some abrupt turns to keep him in sight and Andy Schneider, the Black Star photographer in my helicopter had his mic cord disconnect after hearing "We've been hit". He thought that our helicopter was the one that had been hit.

Dave Milster (PJ Pedro 97): The photographer was in our door taking pictures while we circled the pickup point and when the shooting started I pulled him away from the door. We dropped down rather rapidly to get behind the wounded bird and landed right next to them when they set down. I didn't realize it at the time, but I accidentally pulled the cameraman's com cord and he had lost communications. The last thing he heard was "We're

taking hits" when I shoved him aside and because we were dropping so fast he thought we were the ones going down.

Hal Salem: The aircraft felt like it was sinking. At this time I was mentally preparing for a crash landing in the trees. (PJ) A2c Sanger began treating Sgt Connon and also advised that oil was literally pouring from the ceiling throughout the cabin. Then the "engine oil low" caution light came on! We skimmed along the tops of the trees trying to stay airborne. The rotor RPM held at 230 and I was able to pick up airspeed and a shallow climb to about 200 feet above the jungle. I spotted a clearing next to a rubber plantation and I headed the aircraft in that direction. The engine oil pressure dropped to zero and the engine oil temperature began to rise. Although knowing that the clearing was not secure, no choice remained, but to land. I landed the aircraft with no further damage and shut it down. The crew immediately climbed out with weapons in hand to secure the area. Within 30 seconds, (RCC) Capt Nadler landed **Pedro 97** along side and the "stokes" litter patient and Sgt Connon were transferred to his chopper.

Chuck Nadler: As soon as we landed, first (PJ) Dave Milsten, then the photographer exited my aircraft. After hesitating momentarily while taking in the overall situation, he started taking pictures. Dave Milsten and Fred Sanger carried the "stokes" litter with the wounded soldier over to my helicopter. I took off with two wounded people from **Pedro 74** and the rest were picked up by two Hueys.



(PJ Dave Milsten looks toward Pedro 74)

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Dave Milsten: I hit the ground running to get to the downed bird and Andy Schneider, the photographer was out right behind me. The wounded Dick Cannon was out and hobbling toward our bird, Salem and Potter were crouched with their weapons guarding the chopper

and I figured that Sanger was still in back of the downed bird waiting for help with the wounded trooper in the “stokes” litter. By this time the cameraman must have figured out that we were doing the rescuing and not getting rescued and he started taking pictures again. I pulled the litter out of the back of **Pedro 74** and Sanger and I made a mad dash back to my bird. We took Cannon and the trooper with us and two Army Huey gunships picked up the rest of **74's** crew.



(L to R: PJs Milsten & Sanger with Cpts. Salem & Potter providing cover)
(FE Rick Connon grimaces while being treated)



Hal Salem: Gunslinger

Flight began circling the area for protection. As **Pedro 97** lifted off with the wounded, one of the

gunships landed but could only take-on one person; Airman Sanger boarded this aircraft. Capt Potter and I waited for the second Huey and within a minute the second **gunship** landed and picked us up. The aircraft was so weighed down with fuel and ammo that when the pilot pulled torque, the Huey just jumped about 3 feet and slammed back to the ground. When we hit, the skids sprung apart acting like a spring flinging us back up and higher into the air. This continued three more times until we had gained sufficient altitude for the nose to be lowered,

allowing the overloaded bird to gain speed and climb just missing the rubber trees at the opposite end of the clearing. Dale Potter and I just stared at each other in disbelief.

Pedro 97 headed for the 93rd Field Evac Hospital with the **gunships** taking us to Long Thanh. We were picked up by a young trooper in a jeep who offered both of us a cigarette. I had quit about 10 years earlier and I don't think that Dale ever smoked, but there we sat puffing and getting dizzy while waiting for another ride. The smoking craze lasted for another month then we both quit.

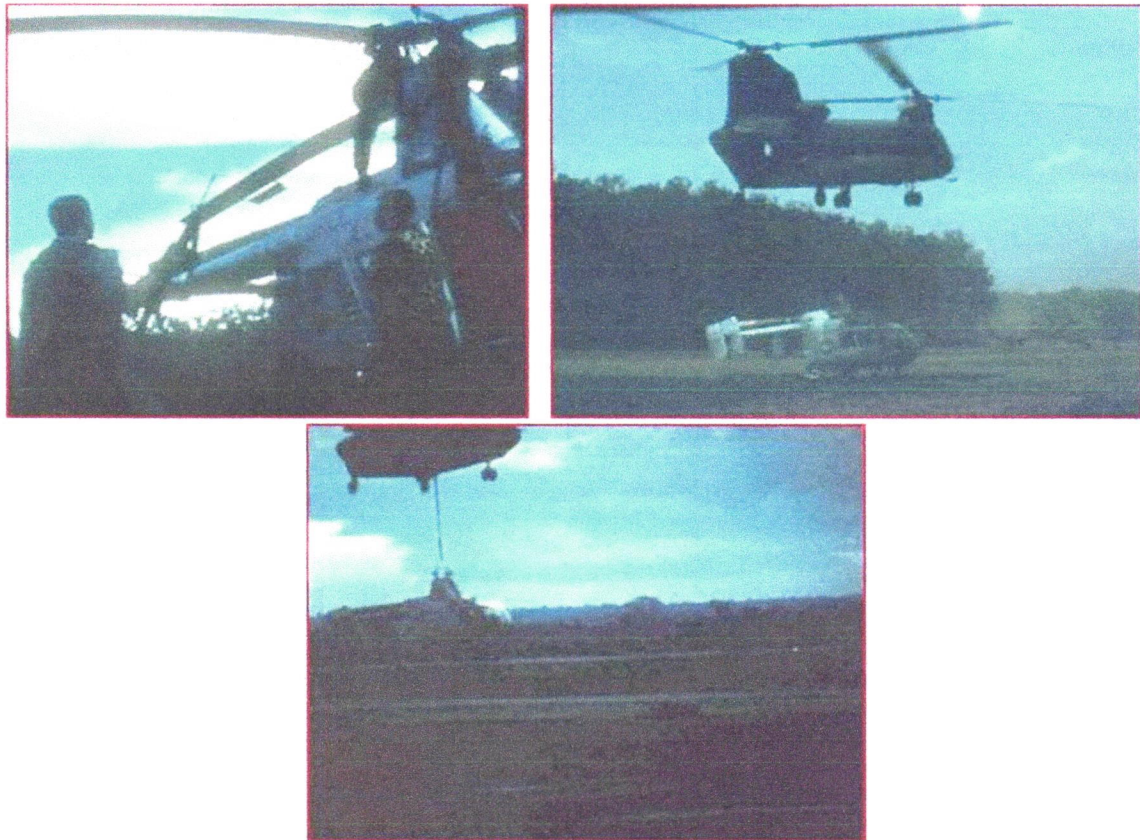


(Capt. Chuck Nadler outside the 93rd MASH)

The **gunships** then returned to protect the downed Huskie and within 15 minutes the three of us were enroute to **Bien Hoa** aboard another Army helicopter.

The following information was collected after my return to **Bien Hoa**. When **Pedro 74** was hit by VC gun fire, **Pedro 97** called "**MAYDAY**" on **Bien Hoa** tower frequency – which Major Kessler heard of the UHF receiver in the alert trailer. He became airborne in less than 1 minute in **Pedro 73**, and departed towards the downed helicopter. Shortly after taking off he contacted Capt Nadler in **Pedro 97**. **Nine-Seven** advised that he had both wounded aboard and was heading towards the 93rd Field Evac Hospital. **Pedro 97** confirmed that all crew members from **Pedro 74** had been safely evacuated. **Pedro 73** rendezvoused with **Nine-Seven** enroute and both HH-43Fs landed at the 93rd Field Evac Hospital at 1545L. After unloading the casualties, **Pedros 73** and **97** returned to **Bien Hoa**, landing at 1555L. Arrangements were made for an Army CH-47 to helilift **Pedro 74** back to **Bien Hoa AB**. The area surrounding the downed helicopter was secured by Army ground forces. **Pedro 73** and **97** departed **Bien Hoa** at 1655L with maintenance crew and equipment to remove the rotor blades and otherwise prepare the downed helicopter for airlift. **Pedro 73** and **97** arrived at the downed aircraft at 1715L. The downed chopper was prepared for airlift at 1755L. The CH-47 arrived at 1805L and made an immediate pickup. All helicopters returned to **Bien Hoa AB** without further incident at 1835L. Total sorties/flying hours were 12/5:10 by the 3 HH-43F helicopters. Two combat saves

were logged. Crew coordination and radio discipline were normal. Weather was not a factor.



(Maintenance personnel SSGt. Cole, SSGt. Vance, A1c Strohaker, and A2c Burnett prepare **Pedro 74** for retrieval)



("Pedro 97 home safe" L to R: PJ Milsten, Capt. Nadler & Capt. King) (L to R: Pilots Salem, Potter, & Nadler discuss the mission)



(L to R: PJ Milsten, Photographer Andy Schneider & Capt. Nadler)

ARS Crewmembers were:

Pedro 74

RCC Capt Harold D. Salem

CP Capt Dale L. Potter

FE TSgt Richard L. Connon

PJ A2c Frederick L. Sanger

Pedro 97

RCC Capt Charles P. Nadler

CP Capt Karl G. King

FE A1c Gerald C. Hammond Jr.

PJ SSgt David E. Milsten

Pedro 73

RCC Major Maurice G. Kessler

CP 1st Lt Mark C. Schibler

FE A1c Alexander Montgomery

PJ A3c Gordon C. Thayer

Det 6 maintenance crew deployed to rig the downed chopper
for airlift included:

SSgt William D. Cole

SSgt Larry G. Vance

A1c Richard N. Strohaker

A2c Charles H. Burnett