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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
37th AEROSPACE RESCUE AND RECOVERY SQUADRON (MAC)
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96337



REPLY TO
ATTN OF 37th OPS

24 SEP 1966

SUBJECT: Mission Narrative No. 1-3-60

#130

6/7

TO: 3rd ARWGP (RCCO)

1. On 21 September 1966 while on central orbit over the Gulf of Tonkin in HU-16B (Crown Charlie), I heard a call on UHF guard channel from "Spitfire 4". He stated he had lost one engine and needed fuel to recover at Da Nang. At this time, 0200Z, he stated he had 2100 pounds of fuel remaining. Immediate contact was then established between HU-16B (Crown Alpha) flying the northern orbit, the refueling aircraft, and the distressed aircraft "Spitfire 4". After several exchanges between these three aircraft the position of "Spitfire 4" was plotted both geographically and electronically. The refueling aircraft gave "Spitfire 4" radar vectors to position him for refueling.

2. I experienced a great deal of difficulty in obtaining this information from guard channel. This was caused by an additional emergency occurring at 0222Z. The other distressed aircraft was "Wildcat 3" at 21:12N, 10605E. Due to these simultaneous emergencies guard channel was completely jammed. Because of this the refueling aircraft requested that "Spitfire 4" switch over to the refueling primary frequency. Since the "Wildcat" aircraft was down over land and guard channel was completely loaded I switched over to the refueling primary to monitor the progress of "Spitfire 4". The refueling frequency was as loaded as guard channel and I was unable to determine if "Spitfire 4" was able to refuel. At this time I switched back to SAR primary.

this is bad

3. At the time of the original emergency on "Spitfire 4" I departed my orbit position to intercept "Spitfire 4" on the initial track that the refueling aircraft had given as a vector for refueling. After repeated attempts on guard channel, refueling primary and SAR primary to learn the status of "Spitfire 4" I finally obtained information that "Spitfire 4" had refueled and was on his way to Da Nang. As a precaution the information on track, airspeed and fuel remaining that "Spitfire 4" had transmitted during the early part of his emergency was used by the navigator to estimate the most probable point where "Spitfire" would run out of fuel. This point was just off the track that would return me to our central orbit so I reversed course and took up a median track between a return to orbit position and the probable position where "Spitfire 4" would run out of fuel.

4. At 0250Z, approximately five minutes after "Spitfire 4" should have run out of fuel, my radio operator relayed to me a message from GCI site "Panama" that an aircraft was down at 18:23N, 107:23E. This position was only ten miles from the position the navigator and I had computed as the point where "Spitfire" 4 would run out of fuel. At this time we were only 15 miles from this position so we continued on our previously determined track directly to the downed aircraft. At 0257 Z Da Nang RCC informed us that the downed aircraft was "Spitfire 4" who had not refueled and his position was on the 015° radial, 52 nautical miles from channel 46. This position was 20 miles south of our previously determined fuel run out point for "Spitfire 4". I altered heading for the more southerly position and

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GROUP 4

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advised the radio operator to request rescap and also advise Da Nang RCC to scramble the HH-3E ("Jolly Green") as they might be needed. I then requested a Naval SAR destroyer to scramble their helicopter and send rescap aircraft to the downed aircraft position. At 0305Z contact was made with the downed Co-pilot of "Spitfire 4". All emergency voice, beeper and UHF DF steers were excellent. Visual contact was made at 0307Z. I dropped a smoke flare to mark the landing position and assist in sea evaluation. After completing the evaluation I requested permission from the JSARC to make the open sea landing. Permission was granted as I turned base leg to final so I jettisoned my drop tanks and completed the landing on a 5 foot swell out of the east south east. The landing was made at 0311Z. Weather at the time of landing and during the entire flight was clear with a few high stratus clouds and visibility 10 miles.

5. As I taxied by the survivor I instructed my pararescueman to deploy. The parachute of the survivor was entangled in his survival gear so the pararescueman was forced to submerge to cut away the entangled lines. After we had the survivor on board and determined that he was well and calm I taxied the aircraft as fast as possible three miles to the west where the pilot of "Spitfire 4" was located. We had determined his position prior to entering the water. Upon approaching the pilot's raft we were aided by his firing a day smoke flare. Again as the survivor passed by our left wing I deployed my pararescue man to pull the survivor into the aircraft. Again the raft had the parachute dangling beneath it in the water making recovery quite difficult. My pararescue man, after deploying into the water twice was able to get the cumbersome raft into the aircraft. Upon determination that the downed pilots were both O.K. I made a water take-off at 0326Z and returned to home base.

Alan R. Vette

ALAN R. VETTE, Lt Col, USAF
Rescue Crew Commander

7 Sep 67

HU-16B Albatross flies last SEA sortie. HH-3E replaces the HU-16 in the water-borne rescue role in the Gulf of Tonkin. The 33rd ARRS commander, Lt Col Roy E Jacobson flew the last remaining "Albatross" out of DaNang. This event marked the formal retirement of the HU-16 as a combat rescue aircraft.

From 1964 through its replacement in 1967 the HU-16 crews rescued 25 USAF and 21 USN crew members. This record was not without considerable sacrifice. (Add saves up from my database and confirm. There are other conflicting numbers)

Four HU-16's and nine HU-16 crew members were lost to the hazards of combat rescue operations in SEA.

Source = Col P. Y. William Corona Harvest ARRS in SEA – A Special Report April 1969 p20

Note: Thurlows web site shows last HU-16 mission flown was on 30 Sept 67

My records show last combat mission 7 July B-52 CAP for Pedro.

Last open sea combat recovery on 21 Sept 66. Would continue flying in SEA until 7 Sept 67. But the recovery torch was passed on to the HH-3's.

SEPTEMBER 20

Moore & Tracing north. Had
secret mission for AF. Caribou from
Quang Tri to Hue Phu Bai. Saw
had a hole $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. diameter shot through
it.

Jeff on 43 also.

Harmon flew Nu-16 (alpha)

HH-43 also had mission to 0930
A-4 fighter crash. Pilot ejection
in.

SEPTEMBER 21

Flower & Moore up North.
Tracy on 43 also Scrambled
for A1-E down in Da Nang area. Found
out to be in N. Vietnam (Dong Hoi)
- Sobering T.O. to Tran Son Nhut
(Saigon) for pick up of medical equip.

- Hitch made pickup off
- Coast of N. Vietnam while on
- Nu-16 orbit today.

HEITSCH JOHN F