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3d ARRGp Hist, Oct-Dec 66

We were orbiting to the south waiting to go in when Compose 05 advised us that the area was under attack again and the ground party said to stay out. During our orbit we were advised that a UH-1 had gone down near the river. When we arrived at the crash all crewmen were being picked up by another UH-1. We returned to LZ 3-Golf to wait. While at the LZ a Dustoff pilot asked us to help them pickup eight wounded troops at 14-01N 107-28E. We were told it would be at least an hour before we could get back to our first pickup point, so we followed the Dustoff bird to the new area. We had trouble contacting the people on the ground and orbited for about 30 minutes looking for them. The Dustoff bird had found them and taken two out. We finally spotted their smoke grenade and went in. We were in a hover at 1100 and lowered our last semi-rigid litter. The man we picked up had a bad abdominal wound and couldn't be taken off the litter so we had no other means to pick up another man, as our forest penetrator had been left on the ground with Sgt Jenkins. The other wounded were not critical so we pulled off the spot at 1110 and took our wounded to LZ 3-Golf. Captain Lowery and I decided to return to Pleiku for horse collars and semi-rigid litters. We refueled once more and returned to Pleiku at 1200 hours. Captain Tyree and Captain Bergold took over during the afternoon. A helicopter and complete crew were due in that afternoon from Nha Trang and Captain Lowery and myself were to take their bird and return to LZ 3-Golf. Pedro 56 was shot down about 3 hours later and our Headquarters advised us to suspend med evac missions. Pedro 98, from Nha Trang, was restricted to LBR only. The recommendation for a high-speed hoist cannot be overemphasized. We were put in a tough position by having to pull off the spot with 50 feet of cable out. With a faster re-wind capability, we could be assured of not dragging the cable through tree tops and reducing the possibility of snapping a badly needed cable.* On 29 October 1966, Pedro 56 had returned to Pleiku at 1200L for needed equipment and a crew change. Det 9 was informed the following med evac requirements existed: (1) three seriously wounded plus our two pararescuemen (PJs) at the crash site; (2) one seriously wounded at 14-07N 107-40E; (3) and 3 critically wounded at 14-00N, 107-29E. We were given FAC and ground call signs and frequencies. We departed Pleiku at 1300L. When we arrived over Polei Djerang, we contacted the FAC and were advised the first order of business was at the site of Pedro 42's crash. Two gunships that were waiting for us just south of the pickup point were contacted, and the flight flew up the valley to the site. The UH-1s made two low level passes over the area and Pedro 56 made an approach. Because we were heavy on fuel, only one man was recovered and returned to Landing Zone (LZ) 3-Golf. The ground party requested we med evac about 10 more out, but another agency, presumably the Battalion Commander, came up on frequency and advised differently. Because none of the remaining personnel required immediate med evac, he wanted them to wait until a LZ could be hacked out for dust-off aircraft in order to cut down our exposure. We agreed. We then returned and picked up our two PJs and lowered a chain saw and fuel to the ground party. At this point, our fuel state was such that we could pick up one additional man, so we proceeded to the second point before dropping our two PJs off at LZ 3-Golf.

* Continuation of mission after crew change.

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It took several minutes to contact the ground party, and then found they had only a heat stroke victim who was up and walking. They were in pursuit of enemy forces and did not want us to pick up their man as it would alert them to the situation. We explained to the FAC that we could not expose our aircraft for a non-serious case. We then proceeded to LZ 3-Golf to drop off our two PJs and to refuel. The last portion of the mission was to extract 3 critically wounded from a partially cleared LZ at 14-00N, 107-29E. After refueling, we once again linked up with our FAC and our two gunships. We arrived over the LZ and the gunships looked it over. It seemed quiet and the ground party said the area had been quiet all afternoon. He requested we expedite as three of the thirty wounded were fading. While we were on final approach, he reported one man had died. The LZ was not suitable for landing, but we were able to hover below the tops of the trees, greatly cutting down our exposure. We lowered Amn Kelsey to the ground and quickly hoisted two aboard. Sgt Brundridge advised one man was in very bad shape, bleeding badly and had a weak pulse. We immediately took off for LZ 3-Golf. After we off-loaded the two men, we were advised the one had died enroute (later were told the man was the one reported having died while we were on final). After about 10 minutes ground time, we departed, joining up with gunships and FAC over the pickup point. Two UH-1s had been in the LZ for a low hover pickup of 2 men each. Then an Army Hiller came in and picked up two more. By the time we arrived over the area, a CH-47 Chinook helicopter was in the LZ at a low hover. Picking up the rest of the wounded and all of the KIA victims, the Chinook departed. We then went in, dropped off three chain saws and picked up Amn Kelsey and one heat exhaustion case. We took off and started our climbout. After flying a short distance and climbing to about 7-8000 feet, we came under automatic weapons fire. We heard several shots, then several hits, then several more shots. The enemy gunner had caught us briefly in the middle of a 5-7 second volley. We called ground fire and maintained course, discovering the helicopter was apparently not significantly damaged to prevent flight. No control or engine damage was apparent, so we continued east toward LZ 3-Golf, which was now about seven miles away. Meanwhile, during the ground fire, Sgt Brundridge saw the Pyrotechnics container take a round. It began smoking, followed by an intense fire between it and the M-16 ammo container. Without hesitation, Sgt Brundridge tossed out the pyro container and observed it to explode with an approximately ten-foot fireball after falling a few yards from the helicopter. He still had the ammo can in his left hand and noticed a six inch torch flame emitting from a bullet hole. Out it went also. Sgt Brundridge's presence of mind and unhesitating action saved the aircraft and crew. About five miles short of the LZ 3-Golf, Amn Kelsey saw smoke trailing from the bottom of the helicopter. I gave a may-day and began an immediate power-off approach to a U.S. Army artillery battalion, LZ 3-Hotel, which lay conveniently dead ahead. Sgt Brundridge, with Amn Kelsey holding his legs, hung out the cabin door and by holding on to a bear-paw, scammed the bottom of the helicopter.

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A minimum hover to a power on landing was made and the aircraft was quickly evacuated by one very fortunate crew plus med-evacuee. The smoke must have been pyro smoke that had filled the fuel tank area through the bullet hole. A total of seven 12.75 mm bullets had struck the helicopter. One through a blade just inboard of the spring constant area. It left a 2 inch exit hole, destroying about half of the spar, chord wise, in that area. One bullet drilled a neat hole through the engine oil inlet line continuing into and out of the right shaft housing and damaging the right tower bearing assembly. One came up through the left forward fuel tank, through the ARC-34 radio, the pyro container, deflected through the M-16 ammo container, through a frame member and was stopped by the co-pilot's shoulder-level armor plating. One bullet came up through the chin, then back out just above the chin armor, taking off quite a large portion of the PA horn mount. Two more went through the empanage. The helicopter was secured and stripped of equipment, and the crew began coordinating for a ride back to Pleiku. The Air Force Liaison Officer at LZ 3-Golf was contacted and he began coordinating for any Army helicopters enroute to Pleiku to stop at LZ 3-Hotel to pick us up. However, Pedro 98, an HH-43F from Det 12, Nha Trang had been dispatched into the area and arrived on scene. The crew, commanded by Lt William Wirstrom, took three of us with equipment back to Pleiku, and then made another sortie for the remaining three members of our unit. As a result of the series of sorties flown during this mission, several things have come to light. The URT-10 radio is not reliable when the PJ is directly under the hovering helicopter. Sgt Jenkins had to relay through the company FM radio which was several yards away. This added to the hover time. Although we can never be guaranteed safety, I feel the med-evac mission can be continued with good results by minimizing the danger: (1) by lowering the PJ, all of the litters and a chain saw, the pilots can depart while the PJ completely prepares the area; (2) the PJ then can cut either an LZ or a low-hover area to cut down on the exposure radius; (3) while the hoist operator is arranging an evacuee in the rear of the helicopter, the pilot can lower the hoist for the next pickup. Note: only when the clearing is large enough, and with the HM checking the progress; (4) and by insuring the ground party understands we only bring out the critical cases, leaving the others to wait until an LZ can be built for Army UH-1 dust off aircraft. During this series of missions, the problem of litter spinning was frequently encountered. A 200' rope will be used so the PJ can stabilize the litter from the ground. The litter can be untethered and the rope dropped as soon as the HM lays hands on the litter. It is virtually impossible to take on two or more litter cases when the rear armor doors are closed. Det 9 suggests they be relocated further aft. The semi-rigid litters should be rolled up before lowering to the ground by the hoist as rotor wash swings them around too much. A fast wind, variable speed hoist should be developed for combat use. We further suggest that pyrotechnics aboard the aircraft be carried in an armor plated container. It is the plan of this unit to construct a container from salvaged armor from Pedro 42.

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i. (U) In the late afternoon of 18 October 1966, Crown Bravo (HU-16, SN 517145) on orbit mission (Det 1-3-78-18 Oct) over the Gulf of Tonkin failed to return to home base at Danang. Control agency became aware of possible emergency because of lack of operations normal reports from Crown Bravo at 1700L and 1730L. Organized search began that evening and continued until 1820L on 25 October 66 with no sightings or findings reported. Aircraft was assigned to 37 ARRSq and had a total of seven crewmen aboard. Loss of the HU-16 amphibian was reported as missing due to hostile action.

j. (U) On 20 October Jolly Green 02 (SN 65-12778) on an ACR mission (Det 2-3-117-20 Oct) was disabled by suspected enemy ground fire. Oil pressure was lost and the HH-3E helicopter was forced to land in a hostile area. The crew and a recently recovered survivor were quickly taken aboard the other HH-3E (high bird) and they departed the area. RESCORT (A-1Es) destroyed the disabled Jolly Green to prevent it from falling into unfriendly hands.

k. (U) On 28 October Pedro 42 (HH-43F, SN 62-4511) on an Army Med Evac mission (Det 9-38-31-28 Oct) near Pleiku was shot down and burned. Three evacuees and the Flight Mechanic in the rear of the helicopter were killed. Army troops and the Pararescueman (PJ) on the ground helped get the Pilot and Copilot out of the burning wreckage under enemy fire. The PJ, Pilot and Copilot were flown out the next morning by another Pedro helicopter. The Copilot subsequently died from injuries received in the shooting down and crash of the helicopter.

l. (U) In the afternoon of 29 Oct Pedro 56 (SN-62-4525) flying in support of the mission (Det 9-38-31-28 Oct) in which Pedro 42 was lost, received a volley of groundfire and had to make a forced landing at Army LZ 3-Hotel, near Pleiku. Crew sustained only minor injuries and was returned to Pleiku that afternoon. HH-43 (Pedro 56) was repaired locally and is back in operation.

m. (U) On 15 November, Detachment 11, 38 ARRSq located at Tuy Hoa AB, SVN became operational. Tuy Hoa is situated approximately 50 miles north of Nha Trang on the Vietnam coast. One HH-43B is presently assigned; however, a second HH-43 will be placed there when resources permit.

n. (C)(GP-4) Jolly Green 52 (SN 64-14229) lost transmission oil pressure (15 Nov) shortly after launch on an ACR mission and made a forced landing. Parts were dispatched and maintenance performed in the field. On return, severe transmission problems developed after short flight and Jolly Green 52 was forced to land. Due to uncertain reception by local populace, crew was evacuated and friendly forces supplied to protect aircraft until repairs could be made. Aircraft subsequently repaired at landing site and flown to secure base.

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