

Rescue Operation in the Mu Gui Pass

On 6-Feb-67, Lucius Heiskell, a Forward Air Controller (FAC) took off from NKP, Thailand to cruise the Ho Chi Ming Trail to look for supply trucks. On that day, "Luke" Heiskell got shot down. Two rescue HH-3 helicopters driven by Major Patrick Wood and Major Oliver O'Mara were called upon to attempt a rescue. Attached is a formerly secret document that is the original "Incident Report" with a personal note by "Ollie O'Mara". INCIDENT REPORT - SECRET Narrative Statement Feb 67 Nail 65/Jolly Green 05 Mission - Oliver R. O'Mara, Capt. USAF, RCC Jolly Green 36

On 6 February 1967, I witnessed a display of bravery by Major PATRICK H. WOOD, FR60158, the RCC of Jolly Green 05 that was without a doubt above and beyond the call of duty. On that date, Jolly Green 05 as Low Bird, and myself as RCC of Jolly Green 36 the High Bird, were launched from Nakhom Phanom RTAFB (NKP) at approximately 0830 hours to effect the pickup of Nail 65, a FAC pilot, who had bailed out after being hit by ground fire, at a position approximately 3 miles northeast of Mu Gia Pass, North Vietnam.

Flight time to the area was approximately 1 hour. During this time, Major Wood, as the lead RCC, briefed me over our discrete FM frequency on his proposed tactics. He directed me to stay in a safe area, since Mu Gia is notoriously known as one of the most heavily defended areas in North Vietnam. Upon our arrival in the area, voice and beeper contact was established with Nail 65. Sandy 5 and 6 immediately descended to pinpoint the survivor, and shortly thereafter called down Jolly Green 05. Major Wood made his descent to the east away from Mu Gia and proceeded up the karst valleys in to the area. During his descent, Major Wood was advised by Sandy that they had observed 37mm fire from a ridge to the north. I observed several air bursts during the time at about 8,000 feet. Major Wood remained low, keeping below and between ridges, which protected him from enemy guns. At this time, Nail 65 advised that he had heard some noises and was terminating his radio transmission for fear of being observed. Major Wood knew that this might mean capture for Nail 65 and elected to press home his search of the karst in a vain attempt to locate the pilot. At one point during the search, he observed chaff in the jungle trees and lowered his PJ to the ground in the hope that this was a signal from the downed pilot. After several more 37mm rounds were lobbed into the area and no further contact was made with the pilot, all forces were recalled and returned to NKP for further developments.

At approximately 1630 hours, an airborne fighter pilot in the area of Mu Gia reported resumed voice contact with Nail 65. Major Wood in Jolly Green 05 and myself in Jolly Green 36 were again launched to the area as low and high bird respectively. Approximately an hour and a half remained until darkness. Major Wood expedited his entry into the general area, overflew Mu Gia and stationed himself in an area where he could make a let down.

Sandy 5 and 6 had preceded us into the area and had established voice contact with Nail 65. However, because of a low overcast which in some areas covered the mountain tops, they were unable to descent and pinpoint the downed pilot. At this time, with darkness approaching and weather deteriorating, Major Wood elected to descent unaccompanied

below the overcast in an attempt to retrieve Nail 65. Again 37mm air bursts were observed in the general area at about 7,000 feet. At this time, Major Wood would have been completely justified as Mission Commander and because of the elements and enemy presence to terminate the mission. However, knowing that this meant almost certain capture during the night for the downed pilot, he again elected to pursue the pickup. he announced that he was under the overcast and in contact with Nail 65. After a short time, after receiving directional headings from Nail 65, Major Wood transmitted that he had the pilot in sight and was going in for the pickup. After radio silence of approximately 3 minutes, Major Wood transmitted that he had Nail 65 aboard and was pulling out. Almost immediately, his tragic transmission, "We're hit we're hit and on fire!" was heard.

I descended into the area, conformed the crash and after three passes ascertained no sign of life, other than the bailed out PJ (Duane Hackney), whom I picked up and returned to base.

My own association with Major Pat Wood began in the same Rescue Group, the 3rd, while in Korea 13 years ago. I knew him then as a young dedicated rescue pilot. He remained dedicated in the highest tradition of the Air Rescue Service. My finest tribute to him is to know and say that Major Patrick H. Wood, after calculating the risk, truly risked his life in an attempt to save another. Failure to give proper recognition to Major Patrick H. Wood for his gallant valor would be a grave injustice to him and to members of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service.

OLIVER E. O'MARA, Captain, USAF 8-Feb-67 RCC Jolly Green 36 Personal
addendum by Ollie O'Mara

I HAVE SENT A LETTER TO DAVID WOOD IN WHICH I SPEAK OF MY LONG ASSOCIATION WITH HIS DAD PAT AND MY DEEP AND SINCERE REGARD FOR HIS DAD'S FRIENDSHIP; OUR MISSION OF 6 FEB 67 AND OTHERS, OF HIS OUTSTANDING ABILITY AS A PILOT AND TEACHER (INSTRUCTOR AT TURNER AFB) AND OF HIS APPEARANCE AND PORTRAYAL OF AN AIR FORCE OFFICER. I THOUGHT THEN AND THINK NOW THAT PAT WOULD HAVE SOME DAY BEEN A GENERAL OFFICER.

I THINK ALL OF YOU WOULD APPROVE OF MY LETTER AND HOPE THAT IT EASES DAVID'S AND HIS FAMILIE'S MINDS. I ALSO SENT HIM MY MISSION AND CITATION REPORT (FOR PAT) AND A PICTURE OF JOLLIES AND SANDIES HEADING NORTH-----I HOPE AND THINK YOU WOULD ALL APPROVE OF MY PACKAGE.

CORRECTION: I HAVE ONE(1) AIR FORCE CROSS FOR A MISSION PREVIOUS TO 6 FEB AND WAS NOMINATED FOR ANOTHER FOR 6 FEB UNBEKNOWNST TO ME ----I SUBMITTED NO PAPERWORK FOR IT AND LEARNED A LONG TIME AFTER I WAS HOME THAT IT WAS DOWNGRADED TO A DFC---NEVER KNEW WHY AND NEVER TRIED TO CHANGE IT -- WOULDN'T KNOW HOW BUT I DO RESENT IT.

I GUESS THERE IS ALWAYS SOME HUMOR IN EVEN TRAGIC EVENTS --I REMEMBER PULLING OUT WITH HACKNEY ABOARD GOING LIKE HELL, LOW WITH BLADES JUST CLEARING THE VALLEY SIDES AND ITS GETTING DARK—STAYED DOWN FOR ABOUT 5 MILES THEN PULLED UP TWISTING AND TURNING JUST KNOWING WE WERE GOING TO TAKE A HIT ----DARK NOW AND SMOOTH---CLIMBED TO ABOUT 12,000 AND HEADED TO NKP ALONE; NO SANDIES. PJ CALLED FROM THE BACK SAYING HACKNEY'S PULSE WAS OVER 200— I SAID GIVE HIM A BRANDY--HE DOESN'T WANT IT- "SEND IT UP TO ME!!", I SAID. AND, SO BACK TO NKP WITH TERRIBLE MIXED EMOTIONS----SO DISTRAUGHT AT LOSING PAT AND HIS CREW AND NAIL65 YET SO TIRED AND SO GLAD TO BE ALIVE.

SO, GOODNIGHT ALL; I'VE ENJOYED OUR ASSOCIATION IMMENSELY.
CHEERS OLLIE O'MARA/OSCAR-OSCAR MRO@TOTACC.COM