

William H. Pitsenbarger was the first airman to be awarded the Air Force Cross posthumously. The Air Force Sergeants Association presents an annual award for valor in his honor.

The Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service is legendary for heroism in peace and war. No one better exemplifies its motto, "That Others May Live," than Bill Pitsenbarger. He descended voluntarily into the hell of a jungle firefight with valor as his only shield--and valor was his epitaph.

First appeared in October 1983 issue.

Tail No.: 62-4511 Model: HH-43 Date of Loss: 28 Oct 66 Unit: 38th ARRS, Pleiku
Country of Loss: SVN Call Sign: Pedro 42

Co-Pilot: George H. (Spike) Bonnell (12E-62)
Position Unk: Francis D. Rice (11E-124)

Notes: Aircraft crashed while attempting to take off from base on a medical evacuation mission.

Tail No: 65-12779 Model: HH-3E Date of Loss: 6 Feb 67 Unit: 38th ARRS
Country of Loss: NVN Call Sign: Jolly Green 05

Pilot: Patrick H. Wood (15E-1)
Co-Pilot: Richard A. Kibbey (14E-129)
Flight Engineer: Donald J. Hall (14E-129)

Notes: Helicopter was hit by ground fire while flying SAR for NAIL 65; crash site located atop 900 meter karst.

Additional Notes: Shot down 6 Feb 67 on his first mission flying an HH3E Jolly Green Giant rescue chopper. They just picked up a downed pilot and were leaving the area when they were hit with AA. The pararescueman, Duane Hackney was rescued shortly after winning the AF Cross for his efforts and eventually became a Chief Master Sergeant in the Security Police. He retired from a squadron which I commanded. Three others and my dad were MIA from that flight. Lucius Heiskell, Donald Hall, and the other pilot were listed as missing in action and still are (I can't remember the pilots name, I'll send it later). He left behind my mom, me 45, brothers David 37 and John 32 and sister 44. Mom died eleven years later of a broken heart. She never remarried and only found contentment the last year of her life when the AF had a final determination board to settle life insurance and give finality that she really needed. She didn't want to let go, but had given up all hope. We miss them both and remember them with fondness and much love. They were perfect parents like June and Ward Clever. Thanks Lt. Col. Richard A. Kibbey Jr., USAF Tuesday, January 26, 1999

Tail No.: Model: HH-3E Date of Loss: 16Feb 67 Unit: 37th ARRS, Quang Tri
Country of Loss: Laos Call Sign: Jolly Green 56

Pilot: Angelo Pullara (15E-50)

Notes: Low Jolly Green was Jolly Green 56. High Jolly was Jolly Green 07. Attempted rescue of F-100 pilot Dusty 71. Dusty 82 was orbiting overhead 'till JG arrived. Location given as 045/19 off channel 72. Also given as XC8752 and later as coordinates 1555-10645.

Covey 54 (FAC) was overhead. Jolly Greens were out of Quang Tri. Info given (first) that ground fire came from left side, then right side. Last report from crew was "from 12 o'clock." Pullara died almost instantly after being hit. Co-pilot wounded in arm and somewhat confused as to where fire came from. Dusty 71 was on the side of a hill and ground fire was coming from valley floor and also from ridge line above pilot. Both Jolly Greens departed for Saravane without picking up the pilot. Sandy 5, Hobo 35 and others sanitized the area. Jolly Green 36 & 37 from NKP arrived. JG 36 (low bird) hit in aft end and reported a fuel cell hit also. More sanitation including napalm when Sandy 7 & 8 arrived. JG 37 made successful pickup of the pilot and RTB NKP.

From Tom Garcia.

Tail No.: 65-07932 Model: UH-1F Date of Loss: 31 Mar 67 Unit: 20th Helicopter Sq.
Country of Loss: Laos Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: Robert L. Baldwin (17E-77)

Notes: Unarmed aircraft were performing a number of outstanding missions. Maj. Baldwin was the commander of "E" flight. Shot while in flight.

Tail No.: Model: GND Date of Loss: 7 Nov 67 Unit: 39th ARRS,
Country of Loss: SVN Call Sign:

Non-Crew: Melvin O. Welborn (29E-46)

Notes:

Tail No: 66-13279 Model: HH-3E Date of Loss: 9 Nov 67 Unit: 37th ARRS, DaNang
Country of Loss: Laos Call Sign: Jolly Green 26

Co-Pilot: Ralph W. Brower (29E-56)

Flight Engineer: Eugene L. Clay (29E-57)

P.J.: Larry W. Maysey (29E-60)

Location of Loss: 161458N 1065258E (YC012973)

Notes: Aircraft was hit on takeoff by ground fire after MEDEVAC of USA personnel. Pilot awarded MOH for this mission. Additional Information: On November 8, 1967, two Air Force "Jolly Greens" (#26 and #29) from the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron were scrambled from DaNang Air Base at 1505 hours for an emergency extraction of five surviving members of a Special Forces reconnaissance team which had suffered heavy casualties while operating deep in a denied area in Laos. The recovery effort was to be recorded by the Squadron as one of the largest and most hazardous on record.

The two Air Force helicopters were advised by forward air control to hold while three Army UH1B gunships softened the area with rockets and machine gun fire. An Air Force C130 gunship, meanwhile, provided flare support for the mission. At 1630Z, Jolly Green 29 picked up the three indigenous personnel before being driven off by hostile fire. Damaged, Jolly Green 29 left and made an emergency landing at Khe Sanh. 20 minutes later,

DECLASSIFIED

in northern Laos, very close to the North Vietnamese border, surrounded by enemy troops. He kept his head, aided the Search and Rescue Task Force, and although in an indisputably hazardous position, was recovered safely. In the other, the pilot went down "feet wet" in the Gulf of Tonkin, under circumstances which should have led to an easy recovery. Instead, he panicked, complicated the efforts of his would-be rescuers, and in an unlikely sequence of events, managed to make the Killed in Action lists.

Everything Right

On 27 February 1967, Captain James S. Walbridge led an F-105 flight in a strike against a truck park and suspected truck convoy in northeastern Laos. While preparing for a strafing pass against the convoy, Otter 1, Captain Walbridge's aircraft, was hit by AAA fire and flamed out. With his aircraft on fire, he headed in a westerly direction in an attempt to reach a safe bailout area, and when repeated attempts at airstarts failed, he set himself up and ejected at 8,500 feet. The following, in his words, was extracted from his debrief. It shows the many correct actions he took; actions which immeasurably aided him and the SAR Task Force in his recovery.^{1/}

...I trimmed the nose high, airspeed at 220 knots, placed my feet back, sat erect, pulled leg braces up, gripped arm rests, and squeezed the trigger. The chute deployed automatically about 60 feet above the falling aircraft with minimal shock. After putting my visor up, I checked the canopy and all was O.K. I then unfastened my oxygen mask to breathe easier, and noticed the aircraft impact

CHECO EBE IN SCA
1964-1971

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

in a dense jungle area 1 and 1/2 miles to the east, and while doing this, turned my beeper radio off. I looked for a landing area, and slipped my chute up a hill toward an open flat rock area on top of the mountain. I made it about three quarters of the way up the mountain side, and as I approached the jungle canopy, I saw that I would land in the trees. So I reconnected the oxygen mask, put the helmet visor down for protection, put my head in my arms with palms of hands under my armpits, and crossed my legs.

Captain Walbridge came to rest against a tree trunk about 85 feet above the ground. He straddled a large branch, and after contacting his flight on his RT-10 survival radio to give them his position and physical condition, secured himself to the tree. The SAR effort was already under way, and Otter 2 descended to get a closer look at the situation.^{2/}

...As Otter 2 came down, I could see him through a small hole in the tree canopy, and as he came past, I heard about ten small arms shots. I called him on the radio and said, "They are shooting at you, stay high!" I then took one large drink from my baby bottle supply which I carried in my G-suit. I tied the parachute shrouds and survival kit to the tree with suspension lines, took a knife, pulled up the dinghy which was hanging down through the trees in a noticeable position, and punctured it. I then stowed it in the crotch of the tree. I talked on the radio to Otter flight and told them I would be off the air for about ten minutes and then return. I then opened the survival pack, removed the items, putting flares in my flight suit pocket, with the smoke type in my G-suit pocket. I stuffed all the survival items that I could in places on my person to prepare for possible evasion in as light a travelling condition as possible provided I heard someone come up the hill. I took the parachute lines and tied the emergency radio, mirror, and whistle to my survival vest, and removed the parachute beeper radio and strobe light. Sandy lead

3
DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

gave a call for Otter 1 and I answered that I could read him 5 by 5. He asked where I was, my condition, and if there were unfriendlies in the area. I said, "I am fine, approximately 25 feet under the chute canopy, 85 feet up a tree, will stay here for pick-up, and that I had heard shooting in the valley." He said, "Do you have any smoke flares?" And I reported I had six, three from kit and three I personally carried. I then set up a listening watch and busied myself tying other survival gear to my person, such as watch, hatchet, and food. I took the beeper radio and put it in a pocket of my flight suit so that when rescued, I would not leave any radios to the enemy that they might use to sucker others into a false rescue attempt. Approximately 30 minutes later, another flight of A-1Es called Fireflies relieved the Sandies on rescap. They made contact with me, established where I was, and the Sandies left the area. Firefly lead told me to stay on frequency as he was going to lay down CBUs. He cautioned me to fasten myself to the tree and not to be concerned about the noise. Also, to give him red smoke when he called for it so he could pinpoint me for his bombing run. At his command, I activated the red smoke, and he directed Firefly 2 and 3 to lay down their CBUs down slope from me. In about ten minutes I heard the Jolly Greens approach by means of engine sounds. The Firefly directed the Jolly Green to my parachute. I called the Jolly Green and asked if he could see me and he answered that he could and asked if I was in good shape. I said, "Roger, I am in tree, 25 feet below canopy that you can see, tied to a tree and ready for pickup." The chopper hovered over me, and I then put my flying helmet on and visor down for protection on the way up. The paramedic lowered the jungle penetrator, guiding it to me by leaning out the door. I took it, opened the zipper bag on top, wrapped the nylon strap around me and fastened the catch, opened the seat plate, wrapped my legs around the penetrator, sat on the plate, then took my knife and cut myself loose from the tree. At this time, the tree was swaying from the rotor downwash and it

DECLASSIFIED

[REDACTED]
DECLASSIFIED [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

helped to be tied to the tree. I looked up, gave the thumbs up sign to the paramedic, and they pulled me up to the door of the chopper.

Captain Walbridge commented that the ride back to Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, was the best helicopter ride in the world. His ride back, however, was to a great extent possible by his own actions in the aircraft before ejecting, while descending in his parachute, and while in the jungle; he had done everything right.

Everything Wrong

Not so fortunate was a young backseat Lieutenant who had everything going for him, except himself. On 27 December 1967, Carbine 1, an F-4C from Da Nang, was hit by probably automatic weapons fire five miles west of Quang Khe, 60 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in North Vietnam. The aircraft commander managed to nurse the crippled aircraft about 20 miles out over the Gulf of Tonkin, giving both Air Force and Navy SAR forces ample time to get the rescue operation under way. The sea state was mild, and both pilots were in their rafts and sighted when the helicopters arrived about 35 minutes after ejection. The aircraft commander popped smoke, and was picked up by a Navy HU-2 without significant difficulty.^{3/} The backseater, however, was busily paving the way to his own early demise. With Jolly Green 04, an HH-3E helicopter from the 37th ARRS at Da Nang, in a 30 to 40 foot hover over him, the Lieutenant refused to leave his raft, even though both sides of his life preserver were inflated.^{4/} The downwash of the big helicopter simply blew him out from under the rescue aircraft. A Rescue

DECLASSIFIED [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
DECLASSIFIED

projecting sump drain of the HH-3E when he fell from the helicopter, leaving him without flotation. However, it appeared that the primary cause of the accident lay in the fatal lapse of memory, on the part of the fighter pilot, about well-known and well-briefed hoist procedures and techniques. 8/

Neither of the foregoing is an extreme example of the adventures undergone by downed aircrew members between 1964 and 1971, but both serve to illuminate the many facets of escape, evasion, and survival during the period. Training, planning, familiarity with Life Support equipment, awareness of SAR methods, keeping a clear head and avoiding injury or shock, all are reflected in the portrayed examples.

Captain Walbridge's every action, from the time he was first hit, was calculated to give both him and his rescuers the highest chances for successful recovery. He immediately headed his F-105 away from the target area and toward a safer ejection point; he selected an eject-decision altitude and stuck to it, ejecting after making certain he was thoroughly set up for it and in position; he looked around for the best landing area during his descent, and then steered his parachute toward it; seeing he would land in trees, he followed perfect tree-landing procedures to best protect himself from injury; he turned his beeper off so that it would not drown out his voice transmissions. After Captain Walbridge came to a stop in the tree, he displayed excellent judgment in lashing himself and his gear to the tree, and taking a long drink of water to help him avoid shock. Then he set about helping

DECLASSIFIED
[REDACTED]