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TODAY IN SEA WAR HISTORY ➤ 6 February 1967

Final Mission of U.S. Air Force Jolly Green 🦶 SAR helicopter HH-3E, s.n. number 65-12779

Unit:

37th Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron,
Đà Nẵng Air Base, RVN

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[SYNOPSIS]:

The first CH-3E Jolly Green Giant helicopters specifically configured for search and rescue arrived in (RVN) Vietnam in the fall of 1965. By the beginning of 1967 there were 50 Aerospace Search and Recovery Squadron (ARRS) rescue-specific aircraft, in five squadrons in Southeast Asia. Later models of the HH-3E were equipped with aerial refueling capability that gave them the range necessary to fly missions deep into North Vietnam with long range inflight refueling.

On 6 February 1967, Major Patrick H. Wood, pilot; then Capt. Richard A. Kibbey, co-pilot; SSgt. Donald J. Hall, flight mechanic; and A2C (CMSgt Ret.) Dwayne Hackney, pararescueman (PJ); comprised the crew of the lead HH-3E (low) rescue helicopter (s.n. 65-12779) call sign "Jolly Green 05." The call sign of the number two (high) helicopter in the flight was "Jolly Green 36." They were participating in a search and rescue (SAR) mission for a downed Air Force Cessna pilot, Capt. Lucius L. Heiskell.

Capt. Heiskell was the pilot of an NKP O-1F aircraft, FAC call sign "Nail 65" that was the lead aircraft in a flight of two conducting a FAC mission for strike aircraft operating in extreme western North Vietnam. His wingman was Capt. Gerald Dickey. The AOR mission identifier was Steel Tiger, Cricket Area 4, a region that included the portion of North Vietnam bordering Laos that included the Mu Gia Pass LOC, one of the two primary gateways into the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail (Trường Sơn Strategic Supply Route - VN: Đường Trường Sơn) via Route 15. Between 17 April 1965 and 31 December 1971, 43 American airmen were lost and listed as POW/MIAs in a 33.3-mile square window of the world, infamously known as the Mu Gia Pass LOC.

When North Vietnam began to increase its military strength into South Vietnam, PAVN (aka NVA) and Liberation Armed Forces of Southern Vietnam-PLAF (aka Viet Cong) troops intruded on UN—1 neutral Laos for sanctuary, as the previous 🇺🇸 revolutionary Viet Minh had done during the 1950's war with the French. This primitive border dirt-road/mountain pass was used by the Communists to transport weapons, supplies, and troops from North Vietnam into South Vietnam, and was frequently no more than a path

cut through the jungle covered mountains. US forces used all technical assets available to them to stop this flow of PAVN men and supplies from moving south into the war zone.

Local Wx conditions were extremely overcast with tops at 3,000 feet and low scattered clouds underneath. Visibility was 4-to-5 miles, in SEA haze. The terrain consisted of extremely rugged karsts covered in moderately heavy jungle growth.

Once in the area of operation, Capt. Heiskell identified an underwater ford (bridge) for aerial attack. The target was located on Route 1501, that ran through a small valley approximately 1 mile east of Route 15, and 7 miles due north of the Mu Gia Pass LOC. Capt. Dickey was directed to hold to the south while the strike was being conducted. Two US Navy A-4 Skyhawks were ATO-assigned to this strike mission. The lead pilot was directed to the chosen target aim-point and he acknowledged that he had the underwater bridge in sight. Capt. Heiskell turned west to fly over the west edge of the valley in which the target was located. Capt. Dickey also turned his aircraft toward the west and momentarily lost sight of Lucius Heiskell.

As both O-1 Birddogs pressed through their turns, Capt. Heiskell reported receiving ground fire. Capt. Dickey also began taking ground fire and both pilots immediately took evasive action. Shortly thereafter, Lucius Heiskell reported: "I'm hit." Gerald Dickey turned his aircraft to the left and saw Lead's aircraft in a descending left turn. The Birddog's horizontal stabilizer had been badly damaged by flak from an enemy anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) battery hidden in the jungle below. Capt. Heiskell reported that he "could not control the aircraft and would have to bail out."

Capt. Dickey watched Lead's aircraft as it crossed over the center of the valley heading east. Lucius Heiskell was able to partially roll out of his turn. As he reached a point near the center of the valley, his aircraft started trailing a thin line of white smoke. Capt. Dickey continued to watch from a distance of roughly 1 mile as the stricken Birddog descended to an altitude of terrain+plus 1,000 feet AGL, when Dickey saw a parachute deploy and descend into a forested area 4 to 5 kilometers east of the valley. Gerald Dickey immediately contacted the EC-130E airborne battlefield command and control center (ABCCC) with a situation report (SITREP). In turn, the ABCCC initiated a search and rescue (SAR) operation scramble for the downed FAC pilot.

Firefly 13 and 14, a flight of F-4s, arrived on-scene to assist in the SAR mission to rescue Lucius Heiskell. Capt. Dickey gave them the direction to the column of smoke believed to be from his crashed aircraft. After some minutes, Capt. Dickey saw a burst of AAA fire over Capt. Heiskell's location and turned to avoid the ground fire.

During and after this time, Capt. Heiskell came up on his survival radio with GUARD beeper and several voice transmissions. He said, "the people on the ground were after him and he was hiding his parachute." Capt. Dickey continued to monitor his flight leader's transmissions for 4-to-5 minutes, after which time he could not be raised on his

survival radio. Rescue helicopters arrived on-site, but were also unable to make radio contact with him or gain any signal from him.

When contact was finally reestablished with Lucius Heiskell, Jolly Green 05 descended through holes in the undercast of clouds, which were lying on top of some of the mountain peaks. Capt. Heiskell assisted Major Wood in locating his position with voice vectors. At 1634L hours, the SAR helicopter successfully recovered the downed Birdog pilot in minimum time.

Major Wood notified Sandy Lead (A-1 OSC) that he had the pilot onboard and was leaving the area to the south while looking for a hole in the clouds to ascend through.

At 1635 hours, JG 05 transmitted he had been hit and was on fire. The Sandy pilots immediately saw extremely heavy and accurate 37mm AAA fire directed toward Jolly Green 05 as they raced through the clouds. Fire was observed in the top part of the helicopter (transmission) just below the rotor blades. Lead continued to the south with flames streaming behind, and continued forward for approximately 1 mile after being hit. Just before crashing into a karst peak, Major Wood transmitted that the whole aircraft was on fire. Other pilots and aircrews watched in horror as Jolly Green 05 flew directly and perpendicularly into the karst outcropping at a high rate of speed while on fire scattering flaming wreckage everywhere. The crash site was located less than ½ mile east of Route 15, 3 miles northeast of the North Vietnamese/Lao border, 6 miles due north of the Mu Gia Pass and 59 miles northwest of Dong Hoi, North Vietnam.

All during this time the weather conditions worsened, and due to the weather, the SAR operation for the down helicopter's crew and survivor-passenger was cancelled.

Sandy Lead requested that Jolly Green 36 to make a pass ~ between the cloud layers to look for survivors in and around the new crash site, before departing the area. After completing the first aerial inspection and seeing nothing, Sandy Lead requested that he satisfy himself that there were no survivors and made a second pass to do so. Jolly Green 36 conducted a 10-minute low-level search of the crash site and surrounding area. The SAR aircrew observed and identified two deployed parachutes on the ground, 1 was located 30 yards from the wreckage and the other 60 yards away from it.

As Jolly Green 36 was inspecting the debris field, Firefly flight heard an emergency beeper signal emanating from the area of loss. At 1640 hours, A2C Dwayne Hackney, the Lead helicopter's PJ, ignited a smoke flare to identify his position and was recovered by SAR personnel near the parachute farthest away from the crash site. No other survivors were seen near the other parachute or the wreckage. A2C Hackney reported that only he and Capt. Heiskell were wearing parachutes at the time his aircraft was struck by AAA fire and that he had been blown out of the helicopter by the force of the crash. At that time, all formal SAR efforts were terminated for Lucius Heiskell, Patrick Wood, Richard Kibbey and Donald Hall ...were listed Missing in Action. Further, due to the intense enemy activity in the Mu Gia AOR, no other SAR efforts were conducted.