

(157)

MISSION NARRATIVE REPORT: Det 10, 38th ARRSq (10-38-50, 15 Nov 67)

Three combat saves. No hostile ground fire encountered. At 0138Z the Senior Advisor Binh Thuy Special Military Zone notified Pedro Control of three wounded-in-action (WIA) Americans requiring medical evacuation. He further advised that an area had been secured to permit helicopter evacuation and that a US Army O-1 "Shot Gun 33", would provide air cover and coordinate fire power if required. Pedro 39 was airborne on a training mission and was advised of the mission by Binh Thuy Tower. Pedro 39 landed to pick up the flight engineer and the required information and scrambled at 0141Z. The ground party was located at coordinates 105 degrees 30 minutes east, 10 degrees 4 minutes north, call sign "Hotel Mobile". FM radio contact was made and Pedro 39 was advised that the injured had leg and torso shrapnel wounds. As Pedro approached the area "Hotel Mobile" pin pointed their position with smoke. Pedro 39 landed in a flooded rice paddy and unloaded the wounded. At this time it was discovered the wounded were not American but Vietnamese Regional Forces personnel. "Shot Gun 33" proceeded Pedro 39's takeoff to discern any possible enemy activity in the area. Pedro 39's takeoff was made without incident. While airborne, the pararescue technician on Pedro 39 administered first aid and cleaned the dressings of the wounded. Pedro 39 landed at Can Tho Army Air Field at 0200Z. Transfer of the wounded to Vietnamese ambulances was effected. Pedro 39 then returned to Binh Thuy landing at 0210Z. Weather during the entire flight was 2500 scattered, 7 miles visibility, and winds from the northwest at 5 to 10 knots. The excellent coordination between Pedro 39, the Army O-1 and the ground party was conducted exclusively on FM radio.

CREW: (Pedro 39 - All Assigned to Det 10, 38th ARRSq)

RCC - Capt Laurence W Conover
RCCP - Capt William J Haugen
Flt Engineer - SSgt William L Crawford
PJ - Sgt Ronald K Sholes


HAROLD PICKERING, Major, USAF
Commander

152

MISSION NARRATIVE REPORT: Det 10, 38th ARRSq (10-38-51, 15 Nov 67)

One combat save. No hostile ground fire encountered. Det 10, 38th ARRSq was notified at 0243Z by US Navy Operations Center Binh Thuy, of a wounded US Navy personnel requiring evacuation from the Co Chin River east of Vinh Long. The contact Patrol Boat, River (PBR) call sign "Cugat Whiskey" on FM radio, was then at coordinates 106 degrees 2 minutes east, 10 degrees 15 minutes north and proceeding towards Vinh Long. At that time the RCC requested "Seawolf" (armed Navy helicopters) coverage. One HH-43F helicopter, Pedro 39 was dispatched at 0245Z. "Paddy Control" was contacted for flight following and artillery advisories. Weather was 2500 broken with winds out of the northeast 8 to 12 knots. At 0255Z radio contact was made with "Cugat Whiskey" who described the wounded man as being in critical condition with a sucking chest wound. Visual contact was made at 0300Z and "Cugat Whiskey" headed for an open area on the north shore. "Cugat Whiskey" advised Pedro 39 that the Navy was familiar with the area and that it was secure. "Seawolf" had not yet been contacted, however, there were three other PBR's in the area. Pedro 39 made a landing on the north shore, coordinates 106 degrees zero minute east, 10 degrees 16 minutes north just prior to the PBR beaching. The injured man was placed on a litter and transferred to the helicopter by four Navy personnel and Sgt Sholes. During this time two Navy personnel were manning guns on the PBR and SSgt Crawford was covering the area with an M-16 rifle. The pick-up was completed and Pedro 39 was airborne at 0310Z, at which time "Seawolf" made radio contact. Pedro 39 released "Seawolf" from the mission and proceeded to the Dong Tam Army Air Field, where the patient was off-loaded at the 3d Field Hospital at 0325Z. Pedro refueled at the Dong Tam landing strip and returned to Binh Thuy at 0415Z. The FM radio was a major factor in the successful accomplishment of the mission. There was excellent coordination between the Navy forces and Pedro 39.

CREW: (Pedro 39 - All assigned to Det 10, 38th ARRSq)

RCC - Capt Laurence W Conover
RCCP - Capt William J Haugen
FE - SSgt William L Crawford
PJ - Sgt Ronald K Sholes


HAROLD PICKERING, Major, USAF
Commander

To:
CC:
CC:
From: :
Date: 3/6/00, 7:29 AM
Re: Re: My PJ Brother, Ron Sholes

In a message dated 3/4/00 1:26:55 PM Central Standard Time, nsseoc@aloha.net writes:

SAR 15 NOV

1967

<< In his [Ron's] November 25th letter, he describes 3 combat saves you made that day:

"We got another mission today and Jerry Pearson, flying the secondary bird, made 3 combat saves, and I do mean COMBAT SAVES! Soon as the chopper landed to rescue the survivors, all hell tore loose. Mortars blasting and heavy ground fire were experienced at the time. No one got hurt, but that chopper sure took a bunch of fragments from the rounds exploding within yards of the chopper. Airman Parks was high bird and said he couldn't believe it was real." >>

Melony,

I remember that mission but for reasons mentioned below had forgotten the date. Our entire crew was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for that hairy mission. I'd forgotten that Jim Parks was in high bird. It would be great to talk to him but according to Margaret that might not be easy.

An O-1 FAC (Forward Air Control) two-seater aircraft went down with the Marine Commandant of the entire Ca Mau peninsula on board as an observer. I believe the FAC pilot perished either in the crash landing or perhaps he was shot. I remember that only because the pilot, normally the highest rescue priority, was not on our minds which means he must have been dead. The crew was aware of who this Marine Commandant was and how important a survivor. We were under no illusions; this was a high priority rescue at all costs.

On our first landing, facing the Vietnamese army's stronghold was under heavy attack and sitting there on the bank with the river not ten yards behind us, we discovered that the Marine Commandant refused to come out of the installation under severe attack by a contingent of Viet Cong occupying fortified positions across the furthest south river in Vietnam. The battle the Marine Commandant was observing from the air before he was forced down was something he was unwilling to leave until he had imparted final instructions to what must have been the South Vietnamese Army officer in charge. We could see him just inside the door way gesticulating with his arms but not coming out.

We were taking heavy small arms fire from the rear, across the river, and I observed that mortar rounds were creeping closer. We weren't going to stay there and watch while this guy refused our generous rescue offer so we took to the air to fly around and come in again. Like maybe he missed seeing us the first time! But that wasn't true of the SVA troops. They sure saw us and 40 or 50 of them decided they wanted a helicopter ride away from the fire fight and when we came around for the next attempt at a rescue they stormed our bird reaching and grasping trying to climb aboard. The Marine Commandant was still waving his arms around in the doorway.

The reference in Ron's letter to "secondary bird" meant that we were in the HH-43 I flew in down on TDY to Binh Thuy from Nha Trang. Captain Robertson was right seat at the controls that day. We were both stationed in Nha Trang and he was, with Captain Belina, the best pilot in the detachment. When we

came in to land on the second attempt Capt. Robertson turned the HH-43 into a dribbling basket ball and we swooped down to six or so feet then immediately up to twenty feet then back down immediately to six feet over and over till we had moved the panicked mass of uniformed humanity back enough to land. We started to take on two injured Vietnamese soldiers on that pass but came under such heavy fire we had to take off again with the Jarhead Commandant still jawboning with his SVA counterpart refusing to be bothered with his own rescue!

With the mortar fire coming close again, one round coming down right in the river behind us maybe 30 feet or so, we took to the air again without the Marine and flew around for the third attempt. This time we held hover at about 10 feet while we waited for the Marine who finally decided to get himself rescued. He waded through the clamoring horde of terrified humanity directly below us that parted as we dropped down. We snatched him and the two injured Vietnamese soldiers onboard and took to the air pronto. I had to push some of those desperate not yet wounded men back out of the helicopter and some even clung to the landing pads until we were 15 feet in the air when they finally let go. With the three guys we had on board, myself and the flight engineer there was no more room in our little bird.

During the commotion on that third run I was just waiting for the mortar crews to blast us to smithereens. With all the SVA soldiers trying to get on the helicopter we became an even more valuable target to the people across the river trying to kill us. We came back each time and landed at the same place and they almost had us in their crosshairs on the last go-around. But for some reason in spite of the tempting targets there were no explosions just small arms fire.

As we took to the air on the same flight path we had taken the previous two times my I felt my duties, after making sure everyone was strapped in, were to help get us out of the battle zone safely. All of a sudden I had a terrible suspicion and yelled into the microphone at Captain Robertson, "Hard left! Hard left!" Captain Robertson instantly shoved the cyclic over and as the helicopter swerved left I leaned further out the side door to look down and behind us and saw a line of mortar explosions go right up the flight path we would have been on. They were trying to blast us right out of the air with mortar fire!

As near as I could figure the mortar positions were just across the river. They had been bombarding the SVA installation that was about 50 yards inland from the bank of the river where we landed three times to rescue one Marine VIP. Our landing zone must have been too close to their positions for accurate firing. To hit something close with a mortar you fire almost straight up so they retargeted on an area that we would fly over that was in perfect range for their mortars. Then they let go with everything they had stuffing mortars in tubes as fast as they could. I wonder if Jim remembers that too. If he was high bird then maybe he saw our desperate evasive maneuver and the trail of explosions where we would have been.

Melony, almost all of the physical things from before age 25 are gone from my life forever. There's little left for me to document my memories even if I could find the gumption. Cherish those letters from Ron and be mindful of their historical value. I'm forwarding this reply to Bob LaPointe who is writing a history of PJs. I would urge you to share with Bob anything written by Ron that you think would be helpful in documenting Ron's or any other PJ's deeds. Because of the tragedy of the loss of my possessions I have little to contribute unless by your generous proxy.

I'm also forwarding this to Margaret so she can know one of the things Jim saw when he was there: his classmate and PJ brother-in-arms living by the motto.