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MISSION NARRATIVE REPORT: (Det 10, 38th ARRSq, 10-38-54, 25 Nov 67)

At 0143Z, Det 10, 38th ARRSq was notified by IV DASC of a FAC aircraft, "David 27," down in the Nam Kan forest area south of Ca Mau, coordinates 8 degrees 44 minutes north, 104 degrees 55 minutes east. The aircraft had made four "Mayday" calls, then no further contact was possible. Pedro 91 launched at 0147Z and Pedro 39 launched at 0153Z flying at 5500 above the clouds. At approximately 0220Z "Playboy Control" (Radar control at Ca Mau) made contact with the Pedros and advised that the new coordinates were 8 degrees 45 minutes north, 104 degrees 59 minutes east, and that a FAC aircraft "David 30," was orbiting the area. Pedro 91 was advised by David 30 that the David 27 aircraft was upside down next to a Vietnamese compound but both occupants were moving around and appeared to be alright. Pedro 91, the primary LBR helicopter had to land at Ca Mau Army Airfield due to insufficient fuel. Pedro 39 who had more fuel, continued on, arriving at the compound at 0300Z. In the meantime David 30 had flown low level passes over the area, received no ground fire, and declared the area safe for Pedro 39 to land. The Vietnamese compound was in a clear area on the north bank of the river. A heli-pad was marked between the compound and the river, and the downed aircraft was about 100 yards west of the heli-pad. There was no radio contact with the ground personnel, however, David 30 advised Pedro 39 that the Americans were inside the compound. Pedro 39 then made a spiraling approach from high altitude to the helipad. There was no one in sight and as Pedro 39 was calling out on the PA system for the ground party to expedite, mortar shells began falling in the area. Pedro 39 immediately tookoff and David 30 advised Pedro to remain clear of the area until a fire suppression team arrived. Pedro 39 then had to return to Ca Mau for refueling. David 30 also advised that he had picked up heavy automatic weapons groundfire and one hit when the mortar attack began. The area of ground fire was inland from the south river bank. Meanwhile Pedro 91 was on its way to the site and arrived just prior to a flight of three US Army armed helicopters, "T-Bird 6". David 30 advised that although the compound was in Vietnamese control the area was highly concentrated with VC and, with the Americans in the compound, the VC would overrun the place at nightfall. Therefore it was imperative that the Americans be removed as soon as possible. With David 30 doing an outstanding job of organizing the rescue, the armed helicopters laid down a smoke screen on the opposite shore of the river and set up for their attacks. T-Bird 6 flight began their straffing runs on the opposite shore as Pedro 91 made an approach from the northwest. As Pedro 91 was transitioning into a hover it was noted that only Vietnamese were coming out of the compound and a go-around was initiated. At this time the Americans were spotted back in the compound and a low 360 pattern was made around the compound back to the pad. The FAC pilot came towards the helicopter but he was followed by approximately 20 Vietnamese. As the FAC pilot and a wounded Vietnamese were boarding the helicopter, mortar rounds began falling in the area. Since the other American, a Marine Lt Col, was in the back of the crowd with no hope of getting to the chopper and SSgt Crawford and Sgt Pearson were having difficulty keeping the other Vietnamese out of the chopper, Pedro 91 tookoff and went into orbit north of the compound. When T-Bird 6 was set up for another attack Pedro 91 went in and hovered over the helipad until the Lt Col was in position to

board the aircraft. Upon landing the helicopter, SSgt Crawford jumped out and assisted the Lt Col aboard while trying to keep the mob of Vietnamese from climbing on the helicopter. During this time mortars were again impacting the area. As soon as SSgt Crawford leaped aboard Pedro 91 tookoff and returned to Ca Mau, escorted by T-Bird 6. The two recovered Americans later explained that the compound had been mortared the night before and it was anticipated the helicopters were coming in to evacuate the wounded and families. After refueling, Pedros 39 and 91 returned to Binh Thuy AB landing at 0645Z. 8 sorties, 6 plus 20 hours. The rescue was hampered greatly by the lack of radio facilities at the outpost; considerable confusion among the ground personnel resulted because of this. Radio coordination among David 30, both Pedro aircraft, and the gunship flight was excellent. Three combat saves - heavy ground fire encountered.

WONDER WHAT
HAPPENED TO
THESE PEOPLE?

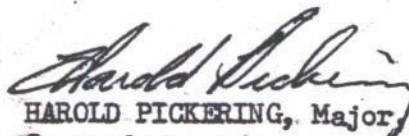
CREWS: (All Assigned to Det 10, 38th ARRSq)

Pedro 91:

RCC - Captain Laurence W Conover
RCCP - Captain William J Haugen
FE - SSgt William L Crawford
PJ - Sgt Jerry Pearson

Pedro 39:

RCC - Capt Donald E Van Meter
RCCP - Capt Thomas D Precious
FE - Sgt Bernard L Touchette
PJ - ALC James L Parks


HAROLD PICKERING, Major, USAF
Commander

Det 10, 38 ARRSq History, Oct - Dec 67

AIR LIAISON OFFICER
21ST INFANTRY DIVISION ADVISORY DETACHMENT
Advisory Team 51
APO 96402

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MACTN-BL-AIO

11 December 1967

FROM: Senior FAC, 21st Infantry Division, APO 96402

SUBJECT: After Action Report

TO: Commander 22nd TASC, APO 96320
Commander 504th TASC, APO 96227
Commander 35th TAC Fighter Wing, APO 94227
Commander 336th Assault Helicopter Co., APO 96296
Commander Det 10, 38th Rescue Gp, APO 96320

IN TURN:

1. NAMES OF OPERATION AND DATE: Helicopter rescue of two Americans shot down at Nam Can outpost on 25 November 1967.

2. REPORTING OFFICER: Major Chester A. Walborn, FR27154, Division FAC, 21st Infantry Division APO 96402.

3. AREA OF OPERATION: Nam Can outpost, An Xuyen Province, Republic of Vietnam.

4. FORCES IN OPERATION: 2 H43, 3 UH1D, 1 O4G and a hostile force of battalion strength.

5. BACKGROUND: On the night of 24 November, Nam Can outpost was hit with approximately 100 rounds of 82mm mortar fire killing one soldier and wounding nine others. Nam Can is an isolated outpost which sits 30 miles south of Ca Mau, the Capital of An Xuyen Province, and can only be resupplied by helicopter. The outpost is surrounded on all sides by the densely wooded, triple canopied Nam Can Forest which is strongly held by the Viet Cong.

On the morning of 25 November the Senior FAC of An Xuyen Province, Captain Charles J. Louvorn, and LTC Ted Culpepper (USMACV), the Deputy Senior Advisor for An Xuyen Province, were on a visual reconnaissance mission trying to locate the Viet Cong mortar positions when they were hit in the engine of the O-1 severing their oil line. Knowing their flying time was now limited to a few minutes they crash landed on the helipad at Nam Can rather than chance going down in Viet Cong territory enroute to Ca Mau.

I was flying in Bac Lieu Province evaluating the results of harassment and interdiction artillery fire when I was advised that a FAC was down in the Nam Can area. I flew to Ca Mau, refueled, and took off enroute to Nam Can. I was working with Playboy Control and I was in contact with Pedro 39, and Pedro 91, 2 H43 rescue helicopters who were scrambled from Binh Thuy to rescue the down crew. Pedro 91, flown by Captain Larry Conover, was low on fuel and I directed that he land at Ca Mau to refuel prior to proceeding to Nam Can.

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I was in contact with Thunderbird Chief the flight leader of a heavy fire team (3 UH1D Gunships) who had been scrambled to support the rescue effort and was enroute to the outpost. I asked his fuel state and was told it 800 lbs departing Ca Mau. Knowing this would permit only 15 minutes at Nam Can I advised him to return to Ca Mau and top off with fuel. About 10 minutes prior to landing at Ca Mau I had requested two flights of F100 aircraft with M117 bombs, rockets, CDU and 20mm to suppress what I was sure would be intense automatic weapon fire. I also expected a simultaneous mortar attack on the outpost as soon as a helicopter touched down on the helipad. (On 18 June, during an operation to change the RF company at Nam Can with one from Dam Loi, the Viet Cong bracketed the helipad as the first Chinook touched down and then badly shot up the "Lancers" Gunship Platoon as they tried to suppress, wounding four members of the platoon). When I arrived in the target area. I closely checked the positions where I had found VC strongpoints on 18 June and while I could see several freshly made well constructed VC bunkers and four sampans I did not draw any ground fire nor did I see any VC. I could see the two American crew-members on the helipad but I was not sure of their physical condition and I expected the VC to soon renew their attack. I was confident that the VC were concentrated south of the river I elected to clear Pedro 39 in to the outpost without delay and without fire suppression in an effort to utilize surprise. I selected an approach path for the rescue attempt, directed Pedro 39 to approach from the north and marked his IP with a smoke rocket. I told him to start down from 2500 feet at this smoke and marked a point on the river by the outpost where he was to turn into the wind toward the helipad. After observing that his flight path was perfect I moved south of the river and held over the area from which hostile fire was expected in an effort to draw fire away for the rescue attempt. As Pedro 39 flared and touched down, the outpost was hit with a 6 round barrage of mortar fire. One round fell in the water, one on the west end of the helipad, one in the river to the east, and four went over the outpost impacting about 100 meters north of the outpost perimeter. At this time I came under intense ground fire and I estimated the volume of fire at more than 20 automatic weapons plus small arms. I took one round through the cockpit. While I have received a lot of ground fire in my tour this was the best fire disciplined Viet Cong unit I have seen. The volume of fire could not have been from a unit smaller than a heavy weapons company. This rescue attempt would have been successful except that the crew to be picked up ran for a bunker rather than get aboard the helicopter. I told Pedro 39 to get out of there and go to Ca Mau because I would not consider another attempt without strong fire suppression on the south bank.

Although I had requested two flights of F100 aircraft very early, it was 40 minutes before a flight was scrambled in support of the rescue operations although the request did not require a parallel at either province or division. I had requested the fighters under the provision for suppressing fire against a rescue helicopter. This great delay in getting tactical air was beginning to complicate the rescue effort because I was now faced with the alternatives of either delaying the recovery and conducting

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the rescue under cover of air attack but without the gunships who would have to return for fuel, or to act immediately and suppress with the gunships and conduct the rescue amid enemy reaction that I knew could not suppress without tactical air. To add another element of uncertainty to these two unattractive alternatives I could see that the crashed aircraft was upside down and I was not sure the occupants were unhurt. I thus elected to proceed immediately and suppress with the Thunderbirds.

Thunderbird Chief advised me that he had two 25 minute smoke pots that are normally used to mark landing zones prior to airmobile troop insertion. We elected to use them. He made one pass down the south bank of the river and put out the two smoke pots in an effort to screen the rescue effort from the Viet Cong on the south side of the river. He and I drew heavy automatic weapon fire as he made this pass as I again held over the Viet Cong concentration to attempt to divert fire from the gunships. One of the smoke pots ignited and one did not which provided at best minimal screening for the extraction, but after quickly talking the situation over we chose to proceed.

The extraction plan involved the approach of Pedro 91 from the north breaking east into the helipad on the north bank, coordinated with the Thunderbirds approaching from the north to a point 600 meters east of the target, laying down heavy suppressive fire on the VC position, and breaking west down the south bank and attempting, while I held over the Viet Cong guns synchronizing the effort, and diverting fire from the helicopters. When the first attempt was made in this manner, both the gunships and I received heavy automatic weapons fire and the Viet Cong hit the helipad with another mortar barrage. On this pass the VC were also mortaring the path used by the gunships, damaging one aircraft. The downed crew again was not at the pad and I told Pedro 91 to come off to the north and the Thunderbirds also came north of the river to get set up to try again. On the second attempt we used the same tactic and the Thunderbirds again laid down a superbly positioned cover of machinegun and rocket fire to screen the rescue effort. The helipad was again mortared and all the aircraft again came under intense ground fire. This effort got the FAC pilot aboard but the Marine LTC did not because he was trying to get the five wounded Vietnamese aboard as well. I did not know there were wounded Vietnamese there and there was not enough room in the tiny H34 to bring them out. I had been unsuccessful at getting radio communication with the outpost because no American was normally on the ground there which is why I did not know there were wounded at the outpost. There were also about 30 ARVN soldiers trying to get aboard the helicopter. I told the pilot of Pedro 91 to "get out" again after the mortar barrage resumed and when LTC Culpepper did not get aboard. We made a third effort synchronized as before and were successful this time in completing the rescue although the helipad was again mortared and all aircraft involved again received intense ground fire.

I feel the gallant performance of the Thunderbirds and the two rescue pilots in the face of determined Viet Cong resistance merits the award of the Silver Star. This action was conducted 30 miles into strongly held Viet Cong territory in the face of desperate attempts of a well armed hostile battalion to prevent the rescue effort. It was completed without prestrike

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by tactical air which would have reduced greatly the volume of gunfire on the aircraft taking part in the rescue. I do not feel that a lesser award than the Silver Star would do justice to the courage and gallantry of the aircrews involved who completed a daring rescue with minimal resources against heavy resistance by the VC.

The Pedro crews displayed great courage and determination to succeed when they could not have been criticized for declining to enter the inferno of fire until multiple tactical airstrikes had been put on the Viet Cong positions. It is truly reassuring to me to see dedication to duty and their willing acceptance of great risks on the part of these men, in their unarmed aircraft.

The Thunderbirds, heavy fire team, could also have called the effort off as being too hazardous and they also displayed great courage in pressing on. Their four passes, first laying the smoke screen down and then screening the rescue effort was the most devastating fire suppression I have ever seen. They were simply superb. Although I do not believe the performance of any of the aircrews involved could possibly have been improved. Each one sensed the urgency of the situation, evaluated the risk involved, and pressed on to complete the mission. There was not one tiny bit of dissention from anyone as I outlined the situation and suggested a plan. Each element understood his function in the plan and executed in a manner which reflected the highest traditions of the American fighting man.

While there may be interservice bickering at some echelons, this was a classic example of determined cooperation to complete an extremely difficult task in a most gallant manner.

6. AFTERMATH: Shortly after this rescue operation I expended two flights of F100's (Blades 03 with 8750lb bombs, and 20mm, and blade 05 with 4500lb H Drag bombs, 2 LAU-3 rocket pods, 2 CBU-2 and 20mm). These flights saturated the area where I had observed one mortar to be located and where most of the automatic weapon and tracer fire had come from. This area was simply devastated with dropable ordnance and by strafing, and the mortar position was hit by the first 750lb bomb and five other bunker weapon positions were destroyed. Two more flights of F100's and a flight of A-1H's were later expended in the area to neutralize other hostile strong points.

The Vietnamese interpreter who was on the ground during this action and that night told me the next morning that the wounded Viet Cong could be heard screaming with pain all throughout the night. The hostile unit was reported as the U-Kinh II Battalion of Viet Cong reinforced by a heavy weapons company. There is little doubt that they were badly crippled as a fighting unit.

When the helicopters went into the area the following morning to bring out the Vietnamese wounded they did not draw a round of ground fire.

Fragmentary intelligence report from the area credit the initial airstrikes with 35 VC KIA with 83 wounded, two mortar positions destroyed and four machinegun positions destroyed.

The action was concluded at approximately 1500 hours on 25 November 1967.

Charles A. Walborn

CHARLES A. WALBORN, Major, USAF
Division FAC, 21st Infantry Division

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
336TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY (UH-1)
13TH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION
(DELTA BATTALION)
APO San Francisco 96296

3 December 1967

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report

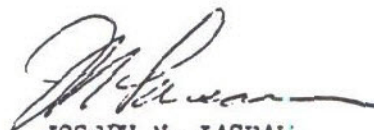
TO: Detachment 10
38th Air Rescue Squadron
APO US Forces 96320

On 25 November 1967, an Air Force FAC was shot down and crash landed at Nam Can outpost in a heavily wooded area 30 miles south of Ca Mau. A heavy fire team of the 336th Assault Helicopter Company was scrambled to the area. Low ceilings in the vicinity of the downed aircraft forced the "T-Bird" helicopters to fly at an altitude of 1200'. Upon reaching the area a radio call was received from "David 30", an Air Force FAC which was orbiting over the area. The pilot of "David 30" informed "T-Bird Chief" that at the present time the outpost where the aircraft had gone down in was under intense mortar fire from Viet Cong positions. "David 30" further stated that an area south of the outpost across the river contained numerous automatic weapons positions, including three .50 caliber machine guns as well as mortar positions. "David 30" advised "T-Bird Chief" that Air Force fighters had been requested and suggested that the gunships remain at altitude until an airstrike could be conducted on the enemy positions. He further stated that any attempt to extract the downed crewmen at this time would probably result in further loss of aircraft and personnel. "T-Bird Chief" called to check on the estimated time of arrival of the fighter aircraft and was informed they would arrive in approximately forty minutes, however the gunships had only thirty minutes of fuel remaining. During this time mortar rounds were continuing to hammer the outpost and it was evident to all concerned the presence of the downed crewmen at the outpost was merely provoking the Viet Cong into intensifying its attack. That plus the fact that no radio contact could be made with the downed crewmen caused great concern from all the aircrews who feared they were possibly severely injured, or would be if the mortaring continued at the present pace. "T-Bird Two" checked his flight for available smoke pots and verified that all crews involved were willing to attempt an extremely hazardous extraction. "T-Bird Chief" then informed "David 30" that he was sure he could place smoke pots between the enemy positions and the outpost if the rescue aircraft in the area would be willing to attempt the pick-up. "David 30" had contact with the rescue helicopter, "Pedro 91", from Detachment 10, 38th Air Rescue Squadron. The "T-Birds" did not have radio contact with "Pedro 91" and it was necessary for "David 30" to coordinate tactics for the extraction. The FAC also had visual contact with the enemy positions and this was instrumental in directing the gunships into the

area to place out the smoke pots at the most advantageous positions. To prevent and doubt as to the location of the enemy positions "David 30" made a low pass over them and put out a smoke grenade to mark them. He then returned to altitude, remaining below the clouds and above the hostile positions in order to direct the "T-Birds" into the area as well as the rescue aircraft. Once the enemy positions were located by the "T-Bird" aircraft "T-Bird Chief" dropped down low level north of the outpost with "T-Bird Two" providing fire support while the smoke pots were put out. The "T-Bird" aircraft proceeded at an altitude of ten feet above the river and parallel the enemy positions. "T-Bird Chief" dropped two twenty minute smoke pots out while "T-Bird Two" led the fire team between the lead ship and the enemy positions in order to place suppressive fire onto them. The "T-Bird" aircraft then proceeded at low level north of the outpost and conducted a thorough recon of the area over which "Pedro 91" would have to fly going into the outpost. "David 30" relayed the landing instructions to "Pedro 91" and reconfirmed that the rescue aircraft felt that the smoke would provide adequate concealment and that they felt the situation warranted an immediate attempt of the extraction. "David 30" received an affirmative reply and "Pedro 91" set up an approach into the outpost with the "T-Bird" gunships as an escort. The "T-Birds" suppressed the enemy positions with rocket and machine gun fire, establishing a circular orbit over the rescue helicopter and flying parallel to the enemy positions to place more effective fire onto them. Remaining at an altitude of one hundred feet the gunships drew enemy gunfire to themselves and away from the rescue helicopter. The suppressive fire provided by the "T-Birds" pinned down the enemy and was the primary factor in preventing the rescue ship from being accurately engaged by the numerous enemy automatic weapons positions. The first attempt at pick-up failed because the downed crew had gone to a bunker when the mortar attack began because they did not consider a rescue attempt possible. On the second attempt "Pedro 91" picked up one crewman and then again came under intense mortar fire. The pilot of the rescue helicopter aborted the pick-up at that time before effective fire could be placed on his aircraft. Relaying through "David 30", "Pedro 91" radioed that he would again attempt a pick-up to extract the second crew member, again the consideration was to get the crew member out without further injuries and to remove the American personnel against whom the Viet Cong were directing their mortar attack. It was felt by all that the continued mortar attacks were in an effort to kill the Americans and keep the rescue ship out of the area. If a successful extraction could be made quickly it was thought that the mortar attack would cease or at least diminish in volume, thus, suffer fewer casualties. Each time as the rescue aircraft descended into the outpost the "T-Bird" gunships provided escort and accurate heavy suppressive fire. The fire support provided by the "T-Birds" was effective and undoubtedly caused both casualties and spread confusion in the enemy positions. During the second and third pick-up attempts the Viet Cong shifted some of its mortar fire from the outpost and was now firing along the attack path used by the "T-Birds", many rounds were observed falling into the river in close proximity to the gunships. One "T-Bird" aircraft received damage due to the bursting mortar rounds. Once the second crewman was aboard "Pedro 91" the "T-Birds" escorted him to altitude and back to Ca Mau. During the entire extraction "David 30" remained below the cloud layer to direct the gunships and the rescue helicopter. While doing so he pinpointed at least two mortar positions. "David 30" remained over the area to mark the enemy positions for the fighter aircraft which resulted in destroying them and preventing further attacks on the defenseless outpost.

In the execution of this rescue under continual automatic weapons, small arms fire and mortar fire the teamwork was all that could be possibly attained. The judgement, planning, coordination and performance of duty by the crews involved in this action is worthy of the highest praise and should be duly recognized. It should be noted that the mission could not have been performed had it not been for the coordination and radio relay provided by "David 30" his marking of the enemy positions and directing the complete rescue. The gallantry, mission orientation and complete disregard of their own personal safety of "Pedro 91" was also vital. The gallantry shown by the "T-Birds" and the devastating suppressive fire and screening was the prime factor in keeping the enemy from placing accurate fire on the rescue aircraft. Had the crews of any of these aircraft delayed their decisions to make the pick-up and not shown such tremendous rate would most certainly have been much greater. I strongly recommend that all crews involved in this rescue mission be awarded the Silver Star for their actions under such adverse and overwhelming conditions.

This action was clearly an example of coordinated action of US Army and US Air Force aircraft working together, improvising as they went along to perform a heroic rescue deep in Viet Cong territory in an area heavily defended by a Battalion of front line main force troops. It showed the courage, drive and dedication of American military aviators in the highest tradition of our American heritage.



JOSEPH N. LASEAU
Major Infantry
Commanding