

27Feb68

Sophomore 50 & Sumo

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Mission: Sophomore 50 & Sumo

Date: 27, 28 & 29 February 1968

Aircraft: Navy OP-2E & RF-4C

Jolly Green's and Other's

I am the POW/MIA analyst for Laos and Cambodia at Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA) at Camp Smith Hawaii and I would like to ask your help on an MIA case that has become somewhat of a mystery to us. What I am looking for anyone who participated in the SAR effort for SOPHOMORE 50, a Navy OP-2E that was shot down in Laos, south of Ban Karai pass/ Ban Laboy Ford, and north of the chokes, while dropping Igloo White sensors on 27 February 1968. What I am looking for is:

1. Anyone who participated in the rescue attempt for the 8th survivor of SOPHOMORE 50 on the evening of 27 February 1968 that has details of the incident or recalls the general location.
2. Anyone who may have had contact with the survivor; did he identify himself??
3. Any JOLLY GREEN, SANDY or CROWN crew who may have talked to the crew of SUMO, an RF-4C that disappeared the same day.
4. Any crewmembers who escorted the Jolly Greens that inserted teams into the area two days after the incident that might remember the general location of the incident.

BACKGROUND:

During the 27 February 1968 recovery effort for SOPHOMORE 50, seven of the nine crewmembers were recovered by rescue helicopters. During the rescue, it was learned one dead crewmember had been left in the aircraft and it was thought the 8th crewmembers, the pilot, had exited the aircraft, although none of his crew actually saw him leave the aircraft. From SAR logs, we have the following details of the unsuccessful rescue of what was thought to be the "8th survivor" on the evening of the 27th and subsequent events:

1714G: RUSTIC picked up a weak beeper that was thought to be the 8th survivor.

1715G: RUSTIC reported a "loud and clear" contact with the "8th Survivor".

1741G: The log entries report RUSTIC, SANDY'S, and NAIL 21 had visual contact with the survivor.

1803G: JOLLY GREEN 36 was over the survivor, but had too much fuel and moved off to drop his tanks.

1826G: JG36 moved back in, but lost it's jungle penetrator and withdrew.

1827G: "Survivor pop three flares", not sure if they were telling him to, or he did.

1830G: JG17 dropped his tanks and moved into area, but could not locate the survivor.
1835G: SANDY's and Jolly Green pulled out of area after contact was lost and it was too dark to work.

On 28 February

0638G: SANDY's 5,6,7,8 and JG17 returned to the area.
0648G: NAIL 54 reported finding two chutes, but reported they were "old".
1145G: CROWN asked "SUMO" to come up on guard, and was answered in Vietnamese. (Note: SUMO was an RF-4C also lost on the 27th in this same area, which is part of this puzzle, which is explained below.) A closing note for the ZULU day in SAR Log Reads: "Sandy people think they may have talked to SUMO pilot last night while working SOPHOMORE."

On 29 February:

0832G: Two JOLLY GREEN's inserted two six man teams into an area 2.5 miles west of the primary search area due to weather. The teams were to search for the 8th survivor and the SUMO crew.

0823G: The "packages" (teams) were picked up, JG-37 took three hits.

Our problem at JTF-FA is we had assumed one crewmember, who was thought to be dead, was left in the aircraft which crashed and the "8th" survivor, the OP-2E pilot, had parachuted out of the aircraft. Prior to our entry into the area to investigate, we had received several reports of villagers finding the body of pilot on a karst in the area where the SOPHOMORE crew had been rescued, and we assumed it was the body of the pilot. When we finally made it into the area, our team got the same information, and after two investigations, was finally led to the area on a karst where the villagers had seen the body, a search of the area located a knife sheath and some remains. We assumed these remains were those of the pilot, and in the meantime we had found the crash site of the OP-2E aircraft, which we assumed contained the remains of the dead crewmember, and began an excavation of it. When we excavated the site of what we thought was the remains of the pilot, we recovered remains, which were subsequently identified through DNA matching as those of the dead crewmember left on the aircraft; apparently his body had fallen out of the hatch of the OP-2 before it crashed. None of the other crewmembers saw the pilot bail out of the aircraft, which was filled with smoke, so we can not prove he exited the aircraft, and are faced with a continued excavation of the OP-2E crash site. Naturally you ask, what about the aborted rescue attempt for the "8th survivor" (pilot)? The problem is the locations (3) given in the search and rescue log for the aborted rescue are over 15 kilometers southeast of where the other OP-2 crewmembers were rescued and no where near the reported flight path of the OP-2E aircraft, this is supported by the report that RUSTIC first picked up only a weak beeper and it took some time to track it down. The area for the 8th survivor is on the planned mission track of SUMO, the RF-4C that disappeared the same afternoon in this area, and some after action reporting suggests a SUMO crewmember may have been the object of the rescue attempt on the evening of the 27th. We have investigated

on the ground in the area of the "8th survivor", but the villagers deny any knowledge of incidents in the area and we have never found the crash site of the SUMO aircraft. Hopefully, we may have someone out there that participated in this operation that can shed some light on this mystery. I appreciate your support and we will continue our efforts to bring back your buddies who were left behind over there.

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