

HISTORY DET 1 40 ARRS JAN-MAR 68

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| DATE   | RESCUE NUMBER   | SURVIVOR                     | TYPE AIRCRAFT            | SERVICE  | LOCATION | JOLLY GREEN CREW                                          | UNDER ENEMY FIRE |
|--------|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| 28 Feb | 229             | Capt Basel                   | F-105                    | USAF     | Laos     | Capt Greer<br>Maj Oderman<br>Sgt Berry<br>Sgt Duffy       | Yes              |
| 6 Mar  | 230<br>231      | Capt Marler<br>Maj Benziger  | B66                      | USAF     | Thailand | Maj Oderman<br>Maj Reagan<br>Sgt Otero<br>Sgt McComb      | No               |
| 6 Mar  | 232             | Capt Lewark                  | B66                      | USAF     | Thailand | Maj Orsini<br>Capt Holt<br>Sgt Grau<br>Sgt Fraboni        | No               |
| 11 Mar | 233 thru<br>268 | Classified                   | EVACUATION<br>OF L.S. 85 |          | Laos     | Maj Haynes<br>Maj Yuhas<br>Sgt Berry<br>Sgt Fraboni       | No               |
| 11 Mar | 269 thru<br>294 | Classified                   |                          |          | Laos     | Maj Oderman<br>Maj Williams<br>Sgt Cole<br>Sgt McComb     | No               |
| 25 Mar | 295             | Sgt Hill                     | C123                     | Laos     | USAF     | Capt Richardson<br>Maj Yuhas<br>Sgt Peele<br>Sgt Fraboni  | No               |
| 30 Mar | 296<br>297      | LtCol Johnson<br>Maj Doran   | 02                       | Laos     | USAF     | Lt Platt<br>Maj Yuhas<br>Sgt Berry<br>Sgt King            | No               |
| 30 Mar | 298<br>299      | Maj Marquardt<br>Capt Hodges | F-111                    | Thailand | USAF     | Maj Oderman<br>Capt McKinley<br>Sgt Hannegan<br>Sgt Boles | No               |

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Mission Narrative (2-3-19)

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GDS-1976

13 March 1968

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At 2300, 10 March 68, I was briefed that Lima Site 85 was under attack and a rescue effort would be initiated at first light, 11 March 68, to remove U.S. personnel from the area.

Jolly Green 67/69 were launched so as to be at L.S. 85 at 0700 along with Sandy 1,2,7 & 8. Jolly Green 70/72 were orbiting LS 36 in support of Alpha Strike and 15/37 were positioned on ground alert at LS 36. After the Alpha Strike, Jolly Green 70/72 were returned to LS 98 to stand alert in support of the effort. Crown 01 depart Udorn at 0600 and was on station at 0630.

Shortly after 0700 the rescue forces together with numerous Air America aircraft and Firefly 11, 12, 13/14 were in the area ready to commence the operation. We were advised that there was two enemy machine gun nests on the field and heavy small arms all around and the possibility of mortar fire.

At 0740 Durex 1/3 were cleared in by Rainbow to start the evacuation but had to break off due to intense ground fire. The Fireflies were called in to suppress the fire. Raven 48 and the Sandies were used as FACs for the high performance aircraft which included Daulphin, Marlin, Hatchet, Pistol and others throughout the morning.

At about 0800 the helicopters were able to land and commence evacuating the wounded and friendly forces. They were transported to LS 36 and the critically wounded were transferred to fixed wing aircraft and taken to another location where medical facilities were available.

Five wounded were picked up from the side of a mountain. They were located thru the use of an emergency radio. 4 were picked up by friendly helicopters and JG67 picked up the 5th under heavy fire with the Sandies suppressing it as much as possible.

At 0845 JG 67 was refueled and 69 refueled at 1000, both in the area of LS 36. They were both refueled again about 1900 prior to landing at LS 98. It would have been advisable to have MIG Cap for such a sustained operation in the close proximity of enemy territory. Crossbow did Cap for about one hour but none was available prior or after this time.

At 1040 the Jolly Greens attempted to land at LS 85 but reported loss of radio contact with the site and that they were receiving ground fire. At this time they were advised to return to LS 36. Numerous changes in this decision were brought about due to rapidly changing conditions; however, they were finally returned to LS 98 because LS 36 had no room.

Crown 1 briefed Crown 2 on the operation and Crown 2 assumed control at 1215. A total of 43 people had been picked up at this time and an undetermined number by the friendly aircraft.

Marvin O. Dillman, Major, USAF  
Rescue Crew Commander

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Mission Narrative 2-3-18 (11 March 1968)

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15 March 1968

Crown 2 had become airborne from Tuy Hoa, RVN on scheduled launch time (0340Z). Flew standard route to Channel 89. When within range of VHF radio transmission, C-2 was briefed by C-1 that Lima site 85 was over run by enemy forces early that morning and that a major evacuation was under way, utilizing the Jolly Greens. C-2 assumed control of the mission at 0515Z. Sandy 3 was on scene commander with a Bingo time of 0735Z. C-2 proceeded to Channel 79 to orbit for maximum radio reception. On scene overhead at Lima site 85 was Sandy 3/4 and also Raven 41 (FAC) at 0524Z. Raven 41 advised he had at least 20 people on the side of the mountains at about the 5500' level. Jolly Green 15 and 37 were launched from L-36 and proceeded to that point. After Raven 41 directed JG 15 to the scene, it was discovered that there was no place for the Jolly Green to land, so it was decided to lower the hoist to pick up as many people as possible. This was a hazardous undertaking at best due to the height of the hover. JG 15 managed to pick up 10 the first time and he returned to L-36 to drop them off. JG 37 duplicated JG 15 efforts and took his 10 people to L-107 where he discharged them and loaded up with wounded friendly and brought them to L-36. Both JG 15/37 report as they pick up people, more people keep coming out of the woods. Estimate runs as much as 40 now waiting to be removed. At 0630 JG 70/72 arrive in the area and are directed to the scene by Raven 41 and Sandy 3. JG 72 dumps fuel and advises he will be able to handle only 3 or 4 people due to altitude of hover. JG 72 picks up 2 and PJ reports that there are at least 30 more people down there still. So far no round eyes are reported. All have been Oriental. JG 72 goes back in and tries again for more. JG 15 is airborne from L-36 0635Z, 15 mins enroute. JG 72 has 4 aboard and takes them to L-36. JG 70 is directed to another area by Raven 41. JG 70 arrives on scene and picks up 2 people when he loses a rotor ~~transmitter~~ altimeter and has to return to L-36. JG 70 is advised to drop off at 107 and pickup wounded on his way to L-36. JG 72 is advised to drop his people at L-36 and returned to area for more pickups. At this time JG 72 advises he will need gas and Crown decides to proceed North to refuel JG 72, to expedite 72 getting in and out of L-36. JG 72 lands at L-36 at 0729Z and after dropping off pax takes off for L-85 again. Crown hook-ups with JG 72 enroute to L-85. Crown advises JG 15, 37 and 72 in order to expedite lifting people to a safe area, Crown will conduct refueling operations in the area around L-85. This way, the pickups can be made and pax dropped off at L-111 and L-107 without having to go all the way to L-36. After refueling JG 72 Crown rendez with JG 15 and off loaded fuel. At 0742 JG 37 RTB to L-36 because of chip light on transmission box. JG 69 est L-36 at 0800Z. 0800Z Sandy 3/4 RTB and Raven 41 is replaced by Raven 44. Raven 41 advises he will land and refuel and return to the area. At 0746 JG 15 had to cut his hoist due to people pulling on the hoist and almost stalling the aircraft. Nobody injured. JG 15 then decided to try and pick up without the hoist by hovering very close to the ground and having them crawl in through the rear. This was successful. 0836 JG 67 arrive L-36. 0834 JG 72 lands at L-107 and drops off more pax. Reports that there are 6 soldiers (Thai) who need ride to L-36. Compress advised of this and it is approved. 0844Z JG 15/Raven 41 advised that there are no more people to be picked up. Compress is advised of this and Compress advised the forces to make another check of the west crest on top of the slope. Raven 41 inspected area and advised no more people to be seen. 0917 JG/Sandy are clear to RTB. JG 15/72/69 are refueled again by Crown 2 from L-85 enroute to South station. Crown was RTB at 1054Z to return CH 83. Compress advised that 102 people were saved that day by rescue forces.

Stanley J. Dubriske  
Rescue Crew Commander

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History - Det 1, 40th ARRSq, Jan - Mar 68

1968

6 Mar - Lt Gen Benjamin O. Davis, Commander, 13th Air Force, presented Silver Stars to Maj Haynes, Lt Platt, and Sgt Taylor. Rescue of Baffle 02 by Jolly Green 15 and 36(#230-#232).

7-10 Mar - Maj Ferrell, Maj Orsini, Capt Walker, Capt Canfield, and Lt Platt represented Det 1 at the Convention of the Red River Valley Association, Udorn RTAFB.

11 Mar - Emergency evacuation of personnel from L-85 by Jolly Green 15 and Jolly Green 37(#233-#294), also Det 1, 37 ARRS evacuated 67 personnel

13-15 Mar - Maj Orsini and Capt McKinley briefed the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing at Ubon RTAFB on SAR mission. 15 Mar - Maj Orsini and Capt McKinley briefed MACTHAI on the SAR mission in SEA.

22 Mar - Maj Orsini briefed Det 1, 428th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Takhli on SAR mission.

23 Mar - Medical evacuation from Libby Jury by Jolly Green 20.

25 Mar - Rescue of Candlestick OIG by Jolly Green 19(#295).

30 Mar - Rescue of Nail 43 and Nail 41 by Jolly Green 19(#296-#297). Rescue of Hot Rod 02 by Jolly Green 20(#298-#299).

31 Mar - Medical evacuation from Libby Jury by Jolly Green 17. Maj Orsini briefed 37 ARRS to assist them in adopting techniques used by this detachment, in particular, teamwork with the Sandys.

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R. Mears, recovered the other crew member. No injuries occurred to either of the survivors during bailout or recovery other than minor scratches.

On 18 February 1968 Major John V. Allison again made two more recoveries when two pilots of a battle damaged F-105 had to bail out near Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base. Their landing gear would not extend. This rescue effort was uneventful except that the rescue was accomplished in semi-darkness and the survivors were so close together with their beepers that it was difficult to get an adequate UHF/ADF Bearing.

Another HH-53B sustained battle damage on 27 February 1968 when Jolly Green 67 was launched to a hostile area to search for, locate and rescue any possible survivors of Sophomore 50 with nine (9) crew members. As Major Frederick M. Donohue was making a low pass over the wreckage, he received several hits. He abandoned the area, had another aircraft assess the damage and, when told he was leaking hydraulic fluid, landed at Nakhon Phanom to await maintenance. No rescues were made.

On 11 March 1968 four HH-53Bs were involved in a very difficult evacuation of several Americans and indigenous troops who were under heavy attack at a forward operating site. The evacuation was successful in that one (1) United States Air Force and fifty-nine (59) indigenous personnel were recovered. During the day all Jolly Green aircraft braved heavy enemy fire; however, no injuries were sustained nor were any hits taken by the rescue aircraft. Commanders of the

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helicopters were Captain Alfred C. Montrem with 38 saves; Captain Russell L. Cayler with 1 save; Major Lucius F. Hallett III with 2 saves; and Major John V. Allison with 19 saves.

Captain Carl W. Oliver and crew were launched on 19 March 1968 to rescue a downed Firefly pilot (A1E) northeast of Udorn, Thailand. The helicopter landed, picked up the survivor, who was not injured, and brought him to Udorn.

As of this reporting period, 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron personnel have been recommended for eighty-nine (89) decorations as follows:

|                              |    |
|------------------------------|----|
| Silver Star                  | 5  |
| Distinguished Flying Cross   | 28 |
| Legion of Merit              | 1  |
| Airman's Medal               | 2  |
| Bronze Star                  | 5  |
| Air Medal                    | 46 |
| Air Force Commendation Medal | 2  |

Of these decorations ten (10) Air Medals and one (1) Air Force Commendation Medal have been approved.

The flying hour, sortie and saves breakdown is as follows:

TACTICAL

| <u>Month</u> | <u>Flying Hours</u> | <u>Sorties</u> | <u>Saves</u> |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------|
| January      | 224.8               | 117            | 10           |
| February     | 229.3               | 84             | 4            |
| March        | <u>222.1</u>        | <u>92</u>      | <u>67</u>    |
| Total        | 676.2               | 293            | 81           |

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39th ARRSq Hist., Jan-Mar 68

At Tuy Hoa AB, the 39th reversed direction from a planned reduction of missions during the aborted "TET Armistice" to a ready posture for defense of the base and evacuation of personnel. Fortunately the brunt of the attack came on Tuy Hoa City, north of the base, and was repelled by ROK forces, elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and the 31st TFW and ARVN units.

In Laos, enemy successes increased, limiting the area rescue forces could use for servicing points, plus commanding high ground adding thousands of feet to the range of their AAA. This caused Crown to increase normal cruising altitudes in early stages of flight, stressing climb capacity of the HC-130P. On 11 March 1968, Lima Site 85 in north central Laos was overrun by elements of Pathet Lao and NVA. This site was extremely important as it was a prime servicing point for rescue forces and contained Channel 97, a TACAN station used for orienting tactical aircraft in northern Laos and North Vietnam. During the assault on the site Crown 1 and 2 refueled the Jolly Greens's over central Laos while the Jollys made shuttles evacuating those manning the site.

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Excerpts From

**"One Day Too Long" by Timothy N. Castle**  
**Top Secret Site 85 and the Bombing of North Vietnam**  
Columbia University Press ISBN 0-231-10316-6

Webmasters note: This is an excellent book and a must read for any serious student of the Vietnam War

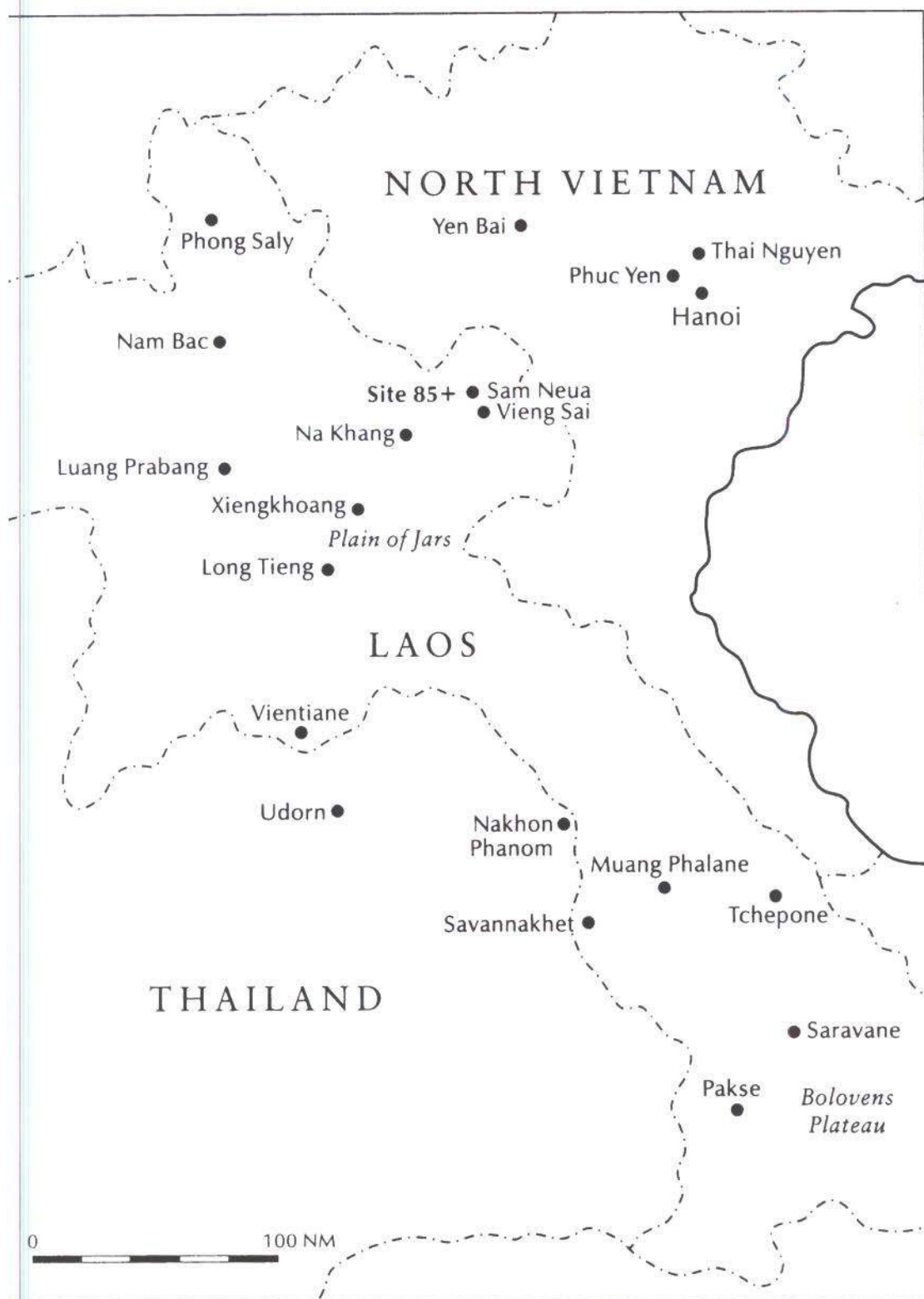
The rescue work at Lima Site 85 continued as JG 69, piloted by Captain Al Montrem, dropped onto the helipad at 8:46 A.M. Spence recall Lima Site that although the wounded had been placed near the helipad for evacuation, once the helicopter landed the aircraft was quickly inundated with troops seeking to get off the mountain. Quick and decisive action by the helicopter crew members and a not so gentle Major Souya Yang got the situation under control and the wounded were placed on board. Montrem then departed for Lima Site 36 with thirty-two indigenous soldiers, including three wounded.

For more than two hours, JG 67, with Captains Cayler and Panza at the control Lima Site, had been on orbit near Site 85 listening to the radio chatter and waiting for orders to move in. As the "High Bird," JG 67 was assigned to stand by while the "Low Bird," JG 69, landed at the helipad. In the event of an emergency, JG 67 could then offer assistance to the other helicopter. Following the evacuation of Etchberger, Daniel, Husband, and Sliz, word was sent back to the rescue forces that "one person might still be alive." Bill Husband had told his rescuers about Jack Starling. Acting on this information, an Air America Huey led JG 67 toward Lima Site 85's western cliffs and Starling's probable position. Scanning the rocks, Captain Cayler's attention was quickly drawn to a flashing light. At 9:37 A.M. Russ Cayler placed the aircraft into a hover just off the cliffs and pointed the helicopter to the southeast. From the right seat he looked across copilot Joe Panza and saw the radar buildings off to his left. Turning his attention to an area further north, he spotted what appeared to be a "dead or wounded enemy soldier slumped over in almost a sitting position." Looking down along the cliff, Cayler saw "many bodies, many Americans" in a flat area with large boulders. Twenty-seven years later, Cayler could still "see" three of these American bodies grouped together near one of the boulders. Nearby another American was lying on his side, signaling with a flashlight. As the crew prepared to lower the pararescueman, Sergeant James J. "JJ" Rogers, Cayler decided not to employ any suppressive fire. "We were there to perform a rescue, not get into a firefight." And, according to Cayler, during the course of the rescue no shots were fired at the Jolly.

"JJ" Rogers had been in Southeast Asia since September 1967, but this would be his first combat save. As the Jolly Green approached the cliffs he was manning a machine gun mounted in the left window. Rogers's initial view of Lima Site 85, therefore, was to the north and away from the Heavy Green area. As he stepped to the doorway on the right side of the aircraft, however, Rogers could see the radar vans off to the left. People, "crouched and hunkered down," seemed to be moving around the buildings. By their demeanor the

than fifteen tension filled hours, the crew of JG 67 reached home and some well deserved rest.

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# One Day Too Long

TOP SECRET SITE 85  
AND THE BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM

Timothy N. Castle



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS  
NEW YORK

ANCHORAGE, AK

Columbia University Press  
*Publishers Since 1893*  
New York      Chichester, West Sussex  
Copyright © 1999 Columbia University Press  
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Castle, Timothy N. (Timothy Neil)  
One day too long : top secret site 85 and the bombing of  
North Vietnam / Timothy N. Castle.  
p.      cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. 333) and index.

ISBN 0-231-10316-6 (cl. : alk. paper)

1. Vietnamese Conflict, 1961-1975—Laos.
2. Vietnamese Conflict, 1961-1975—Secret service—United States.
3. Vietnamese Conflict, 1961-1975—Aerial operations, American.
4. United States. Central Intelligence Agency. I. Title.

DS559.73.L28C37      1999

959.704'348—dc21

98-43117

CIP

Casebound editions of Columbia University Press books are  
printed on permanent and durable acid-free paper.

Printed in the United States of America

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## INTRODUCTION

In March 1994 I stood on the edge of the windswept western cliffs of Phou<sup>1</sup> Pha Thi, a 5,800-foot karst located a scant twelve nautical miles south of the Laotian-Vietnamese border. Taken aback by the breathtaking vista of lush emerald valleys and the soft pillows of white clouds that covered the region's lesser peaks, I tried to envision the intense military activity that had occurred at what during the Vietnam war had been a critical U.S. outpost—the home to project “Heavy Green,” one of the Vietnam war's most highly classified programs. Now the rugged and unforgiving land was eerily peaceful, except for the indifferent bleating of a few goats.

Over the past twenty years, I have regularly encountered oral and written accounts of a top secret, American-operated facility in Laos called “Lima Site 85.” Perched on the southwestern aspect of Phou Pha Thi, the base had two distinct missions. Since at least 1962 the CIA had operated an intelligence collection program in northeastern Laos, supported by a crude 600 by 50-foot runway scratched out along the mountain's southeastern flank. The small landing strip was part of a Laos-wide aerial supply system operated by Air America, Inc., a supposedly private airline contracted by the U.S. government.<sup>2</sup> Although U.S. operations were conducted near Pha Thi's summit, more than a mile from the runway, “LS 85” or “Site 85,” became the common terms for the American base at Pha Thi mountain.<sup>3</sup>

LS 85's other major role, which began in late October 1967 and ended catastrophically in early March 1968, involved the top-secret

operation of a U.S. Air Force radar system that provided the United States with a heretofore unavailable all-weather bombing capability in Laos and North Vietnam. In particular, the Site 85-based radar enabled the Heavy Green technicians<sup>4</sup> to direct F-105 fighter-bombers against important targets in and around the North Vietnamese capital of Hanoi—125 nautical miles to the east. The facility was controversial. The U.S. ambassador to Laos was opposed to it, while CIA experts warned that the North Vietnamese would quickly move to destroy the site. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, convinced the White House that the military gain outweighed the personnel and political risks.

Indeed, the increased American presence evoked an unprecedented response from the North Vietnamese. On January 12, 1968, Hanoi launched four lumbering Soviet-built AN-2 Colt biplanes against the site in a midday bombing attack. Two of the aircraft fired rockets and dropped modified mortar rounds near radar and navigational equipment before they were driven off and crashed, likely due to the hot pursuit of an Air America helicopter. Although one of the Heavy Green personnel was wounded and the tactical air navigation system was temporarily knocked off-line, the men stayed at their posts and the radar system remained in service. The North Vietnamese began almost immediately to bring heavy weapons and thousands of troops to bear on the vexing American base.

Nonetheless, confident they could monitor the enemy movements and provide adequate warning for a controlled evacuation and destruction of the site, U.S. Air Force officials continued and even expanded the radar operations at Site 85. In early 1968, faced with exceptionally poor flying conditions, radar often provided the only means by which Air Force bombers could reach their targets in North Vietnam. More importantly perhaps in terms of inflicting casualties and damage, the site was controlling hundreds of air strikes against People's Army of Vietnam and Pathet Lao forces in northeastern Laos. Ironically, although the men were told they would be attacking Hanoi only a handful of their missions were directed at key targets near the capital city. Nevertheless, senior 7th Air Force officers in Saigon believed Heavy Green was a unique capability and, notwithstanding numerous CIA reports of an impending attack, demanded the site be kept open.

Unbeknownst to the Americans, the North Vietnamese had also ordered a special sapper unit, called *Dac Cong*, into action.<sup>5</sup> On March 11, 1968, in a well planned and orchestrated attack supported by a heavy

artillery, mortar, and rocket bombardment, the sappers climbed the southwestern face of the mountain and under cover of darkness overran the radar and navigational facility. Sixteen Heavy Green technicians bore the brunt of the attack while, some 200 yards below them to the east, the shelling forced two CIA case officers and a U.S. Air Force combat controller to remain in their bunkers. Hmong and Thai security forces, variously located around the mountaintop, failed to detect or deter the sappers.

Surveying the ruins of Site 85 in 1994, I thought of the men who had secretly served their country at this lonely and harsh mile-high base. Brave Americans who, despite the certain knowledge that they were surrounded by communist forces, continued for weeks to operate their radar and navigation equipment: dedicated men, who believed their efforts provided U.S. Air Force pilots a critical measure of safety during difficult and dangerous "Rolling Thunder" bombing missions; men skilled in electronics, not the use of combat arms, who suddenly found themselves the object of a deadly North Vietnamese assault.

The clever PAVN tactics silenced Heavy Green and exacted a terrible human toll—the largest single ground combat loss of U.S. Air Force personnel in the history of the Vietnam war. Despite a daring and hurried rescue operation carried out by U.S. Air Force and Air America helicopters, just four of the technicians, the combat controller, and the two CIA officers escaped the mountain. As for the others, eleven have never been found, and another was killed by enemy gunfire shortly after being pulled aboard a helicopter. Two of the eleven technicians are known to have been killed outright, but many unanswered questions cloud the fate of the remaining men.

For the man standing at my side, gazing off into the distance that was now the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, this mountaintop evoked especially painful memories. Now fast approaching his seventieth birthday, Retired Air Force Colonel Gerald H. ("Jerry") Clayton, had been the Heavy Green commander. From the command post at Udorn Royal Thai Air Base, he monitored the final hours of a program he had guided since its inception. Colonel Clayton had approved the selection of each man; he knew their families and their dreams.

Nearly twenty-six years later, almost to the day of the attack, Colonel Clayton and I were technical advisers to an NBC News team investigating the loss of Site 85. Accompanied by the first U.S. govern-

ment investigators to ever reach the mountain, we were allowed to briefly walk around and film the site. Jerry led the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) investigator on a hurried tour, pointing out the former locations of buildings, equipment, and key geographic features. Ultimately, the rocky mountain gave up no firm evidence with which to resolve the fate of the missing men. The whereabouts of more than 150 tons of equipment was also unexplained. However, the lack of bomb craters and other indications that the site was not destroyed by U.S. aircraft and U.S.-directed artillery fire (as had been reported in official accounts) presented the possibility of new explanations as to the fate of the facility and its men.

Seeking additional facts we interviewed local villagers, Lao soldiers present in the area during the attack, and key provincial officials. We gained rare permission to visit the normally off-limits town of Vieng Sai near the Vietnam border and spent a day surveying and filming the extensive cave system that served as the wartime headquarters of the communist Pathet Lao government.<sup>6</sup> In the Laotian capital of Vientiane we pressed to view communist wartime films at the government film archives and discovered footage related to the Phou Pha Thi battle. Our search extended to Vietnam and, in a Hanoi military museum, we located an extraordinary mock-up and a detailed description of the January 1968 air attack on Site 85. In less than a month we had learned more about the final hours of Heavy Green, especially from the communist perspective, than had been uncovered by the U.S. government in the past quarter century.

On our last night in Hanoi, Jerry Clayton and I sat in his room at the Metropole Hotel and discussed in depth the genesis, operation, and aftermath of the Heavy Green program. I became convinced the true story of Site 85 needed to be told. In the nearly three decades since the facility was lost, not a single accurate account had emerged. A detailed U.S. Air Force monograph "The Fall of Site 85" (originally classified top secret and officially declassified in 1988) contains numerous errors.<sup>7</sup> Other official Air Force histories of the war, one published as late as 1993, are likewise flawed.<sup>8</sup> Various popular accounts of Site 85 have also appeared in books dealing with the American war in Laos, mostly using a mixture of the inaccurate Air Force accounts and the sometimes self-indulgent recollections of U.S. Air Force, Air America, CIA, and State Department participants.<sup>9</sup> In fairness, none of these authors had personal access to the site and the vast amount of infor-

mation gained as a result of the March 1994 investigations at Phou Pha Thi, Vientiane, and Hanoi. Nevertheless, many of these earlier accounts have confused and sometimes enraged those family members who continue to seek answers to the fate of their loved ones.

And one must wonder, given the substantial information available on Site 85 to military and civilian authorities, why have some U.S. government representatives deliberately obfuscated the facts? The deception began immediately after the fall of the site and continued for more than a decade. Some family members believe, and official actions and documents seem to support the charge, that the deception continues. This book will document these efforts to mislead the public and various Heavy Green family members and offers explanations for this behavior.

In 1996, while working as the Chief of Southeast Asia Archival Research, Defense POW/MIA office, I was asked by the director, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense James W. Wold, to prepare a written assessment of the facts surrounding the status of the U.S. government's investigation of the Site 85 losses. After reading the evaluation, which was critical of sloppy and inappropriate work by two senior people in the office, Secretary Wold ordered a full-scale reevaluation of the case. Regrettably, I then became part of the Site 85 story—caught up in trying to focus attention on the facts of the attack, especially Vietnamese knowledgeability, while others were embarrassed, angry, and intent on closing the case.

Because this controversy attracted Congressional scrutiny and resulted in the surfacing of important new information proving the Vietnamese have withheld access to witnesses and records pertinent to the Site 85 loss, I have included a documented review and my recollections of these events. Recognizing that this may cause some to question my academic objectivity, I would simply ask the reader to judge the book on its documentation and scholarship.

On the communist side, glaring falsehoods and inconsistencies in responses to family members and U.S. POW/MIA officials raise troubling questions about their often stated commitment to a full accounting of U.S. servicemen. Multiple requests over many years to the Vietnamese and Lao governments for information on the military campaign against Site 85 go unanswered, although there can be no doubt that current and former senior Vietnamese and Lao officials know, or could easily determine, precisely what happened at Phou Pha Thi. In

this regard, I am especially guided by a 1997 conversation in Phnom Penh, Cambodia with a very senior Cambodian Communist Party historian who spent decades working in Hanoi with Vietnamese Communist Party historians. Comfortably retired and no longer constrained by any political agenda, he was quite open and unequivocal in his views. When asked about the completeness of North Vietnamese wartime record keeping he smiled and nodded. "They know," he said, "they know."

This book's goal, then, is to provide an authoritative account of the Heavy Green program. What emerges is a covert operation conducted within the framework of a duplicitous and unparalleled American foreign policy—the presidentially directed introduction of American military men into neutral Laos to improve the effectiveness of U.S. bombing in North Vietnam. When disaster struck Heavy Green, perhaps due to official negligence, U.S. representatives embarked on an immediate and decades long coverup. Senior Air Force officers with extensive knowledge of the Site 85 operation and loss have misrepresented the facts in official written accounts and during a lawsuit filed by a Heavy Green family. They accomplished much of their obfuscation by maintaining the secrecy of relevant documents. Indeed, had the families and attorneys been provided full access to those documents, the government could scarcely have claimed the attack was a surprise. Without the persistence of Heavy Green family members and POW/MIA activists in the face of the outrageous conduct in Hanoi, Vientiane, and Washington, none of this might ever have come to light.

Using heretofore unavailable and unpublished official documents and the oral accounts of American, Thai, Lao, and Vietnamese witnesses, I trace the evolution of Heavy Green from its inception, placement in Laos, operation, and destruction. I show its impact on the families, and the efforts (both positive and negative) undertaken by the United States and the governments of Vietnam and Laos to learn the fate of the eleven missing men.

Using these unique resources I address the following questions: Why and how was the Heavy Green program established? What were the roles and responsibilities of the U.S. ambassador to Laos and senior Air Force officials? What were the actual targets? Who was ultimately responsible for the decision to continue the operations in the face of certain communist attack? Was the U.S. embassy in Laos,

specifically the CIA station there and the U.S. Air Force Attaché Office, conscientious in its oversight of the Heavy Green project? How was the communist assault at Site 85 carried out and why was it so successful? Why were the families of the Heavy Green participants not accurately informed of the known circumstances at Site 85? Faced with a lawsuit by a Heavy Green family in 1975, how was the U.S. government able to claim the attack on Site 85 was a surprise? Why did it take the U.S. government until 1981, eight years after hostilities ended, to place the eleven men on the official unaccounted for list? What actions have been undertaken by the Defense Department? Thirty years after the loss of Site 85, why is the U.S. government still reluctant to seek a complete review and explanation for what happened at Phou Pha Thi?

Despite the paucity of information from North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao sources, and less than complete access to all U.S. records, I am confident that this book is an accurate history of project Heavy Green, the loss of Site 85, and a three-decade-long U.S. government coverup. Perhaps it will serve as a case study for U.S. foreign policy decisionmakers, especially those empowered to send men and women into harm's way. Those who are prepared to forfeit their lives should have no doubt that in the event of their death or capture their families will be treated with compassion and respect. Most of all, I believe I have provided the American public and the surviving Heavy Green personnel and their families a clear and unbiased account of a little known, but critically important chapter in the Vietnam war.

Nothing, short of strong physical evidence, however, will replace the uncertainty and suspicion that continues to pervade the lives of many Heavy Green families. Surely their government owes them and all the other MIA families a meaningful accounting.