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Mission Narrative 1-3-52

17 May 1968

On 16 May 1968, Queen directed Crown 4 to divert to the Kham Duc area to coordinate the recovery effort of 3 survivors at the airfield. Upon our arrival a FAC Jake 70 was coordinating strikes in the vicinity and had the survivors in sight by a rock made SOS signal. We scrambled Jolly Green 28 and 24 out of Ch 77 and they were airborne at 0235Z. They were escorted by Spad 11/12/13. Numerous flight of A-4's and air force strike aircraft were put into the area to suppress ground fire. Shortly afterwards, Spad 11 determines the area safe enough for Jolly Green 28 to attempt a recovery. Jolly Green 24 stayed high while Jolly Green 28 effected the recovery of 2 of the survivors. Number 3 man was not recovered due to heavy ground fire and inability to get on the penetrator due to physical exhaustion. Jolly Green 28 was RTB to Ch 77 with the survivors. Jolly Green 23 was scrambled to provide coverage for Jolly Green 24 who would attempt recovery of the 3rd survivor. Additional strikes were placed in the area and again Spad 11 determined it safe for the Jolly Green to effect the recovery. The third survivor was recovered without further incident and taken to Ch 77. All forces were RTB at 0545Z.

Richard E. Porter, Major, USAF
Rescue Crew Commander

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37ARPSq Hist, Apr-Jun 1968

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200 feet between trees to the survivors. The rescue specialist was lowered on the hoist and four survivors hoisted up and carried to NSA Hospital, DaNang. JG 25 and 10 arrived on the scene and under parachute flares and with the aid of aircraft flood lights and ground strobe lights, rescued 8 more survivors and took them to NSA Hospital. Jolly Greens 10, 21, 25, and 28 alternated recoveries until all but 2 of the survivors had been transported to NSA Hospital. Weather prevented recovery of the eight until the next morning. The names of the individuals rescued are unknown.

(14)(U) 1-3-52, 16 May 68. On this mission, Jolly Green 28 and 24 were scrambled from DaNang strip alert to rescue three survivors of the Kham Duc Airfield. The rescue forces joined up over the rescue area and strikes were called in to sterilize the area around the survivors. JG 28 was led to a hover over two of the survivors and successfully hoisted them aboard despite heavy automatic weapons ground fire. The third survivor was spotted and JG 24 entered a hover over the spot where the survivor was last seen. After approximately 5 minutes of searching while in a hover, the survivor was spotted and hoisted aboard. The names of the survivors were 1st (E-5) Edward Sassenberger, E-4 Wilbert Foreman, and PTC John C. Colonna, all U

(15)(U) 1-3-44, 21 May 68. Jolly Greens 25 and 29 were

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
37TH AEROSPACE RESCUE AND RECOVERY SQUADRON (MAC)
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96337

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REPLY TO
ATTN: AF

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SUBJECT: Mission Narrative Report (1-3-52, 16 May 68) (U)

18 MAY 1968

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Classified by
SUBJECT TO GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION
SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
AUTOMATICALLY DOWNGRADED AT TWO
YEAR INTERVALS
DECLASSIFIED ON 5/20/74

1. (U) This report is submitted in accordance with ARRSN 55-2/3 ARRGp Sup 1, dated 15 Jun 1967.

2. (C) Jolly Green 28 and 24, DaNang strip alert were alerted at 0225Z for an impending rescue of three survivors of the Kham Duc Airfield battle. JG 28 low bird, and Jolly Green 24, high bird, scrambled at 0240Z. Contact was established with Queen and Crown 4 on climbout. Friendly artillery being fired into the area of intended flight caused JG's 28 and 24 to become separated. Spads 11, 12, 13 were airborne at 0245Z and climbed out to the southeast to avoid the friendly artillery. Spads 11 and 12 flew directly to the scene which was 212/44/Ch 77. After some difficulty, Spad 13 and JG 28 joined up. Channel 77 being inoperative and towering cumulus clouds over the mountain tops, slowed the join-up of the rescue forces over the rescue area. DF steers were the only nav aid available and used for the join-up. JG 28, 24, and Spad 11 established an orbit 5 miles southeast of the airfield at 9,000 feet. 37mm anti-aircraft fire had been reported 3.4 miles northwest and southwest of the enemy occupied Kham Duc Airfield. Upon arrival at the rescue scene, Jake 70 (O-24) was in the process of sterilizing the enemy forces around the survivors. Spad 11 assumed control and numerous strikes were placed in the area by A-4s (call signs unknown). At least one secondary explosion was observed about half a mile from the survivors. Jake 70 stated 50 cal. automatic weapons fire had been seen approximately 1,000 meters west of the survivors earlier in the morning and another helicopter had been driven out of the area. The survivors had attracted attention by building an SOS signal from sheets of paper and by a signal mirror. The survivors were located in a bombed out area on the side of a 70° slope. Spads 23 and 24 made repeated passes after the high performance strikes and further suppressed enemy forces. Spad 11 made repeated passes trying to draw fire and identified the survivors because one of them removed his shirt and exposed his white body. At 0400, Spads 11, 12, and 13 led JG 28 down a ridge line across a creek, over a road and another ridge line to the survivors. JG 28 spotted two survivors by the paper SOS and entered a 200 out of ground effect hover to hoist the survivors. JG 28 lowered the hoist and the survivors had difficulty getting the forest penetrator because of oscillations. The survivors had further difficulty getting on the forest penetrator because they did not understand its operation. As the survivors were getting on the penetrator, the RS and Co-pilot heard ground fire to the south of the hovering helicopter and Spads 11, 12, and 13 made several passes firing rockets and 20mm. After the two survivors were on board the GROUP 4

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Downgraded at 3 year
intervals; declassified
after 12 years

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RS spotted the third survivor climbing the steep hill. The survivor was collapsed on the ground, but was still thought to be alive. JG 28 made a 180° hovering turn and descended to try for the third survivor. At this time the intensity of ground fire and other fire seemed to triple and JG 28 thought he had taken a hit. A take off was initiated along the same route of entry. As the ridgeline just northeast of the survivors was crossed JG 28 heard a series of automatic weapons bursts. Climb airspeed had been obtained and JG 28 immediately began jinking in an effort to prevent being hit. JG 28 climbed to 7,000 feet to the east and joined JG 24 in orbit. A discussion between JGs, Spads, Jake 70, Queen and Crown concerning fuel states, need for more strikes, the remaining survivor, and JG 28's possible hit ensued. The decision was made to call for another JG and more airstrikes and JG 28 was RTB'd with the two survivors who had multiple 3 or 4 day old wounds. JG 28 returned to Channel 77 after artillery SW of Channel 77 had been suspended. Landing was at 0500Z.

Jolly Green 24 continued to hold in the area of Kham Duc after JG 28 returned to home base. Continued A-4 strikes were directed by Jake 75, an O-2A, in an attempt to knock out the sources of ground fire while another HH-3E JG 23 was launched from Ch 77. Jake 75 reported that the survivor had slid down the slope under some trees when JG 28 departed, and had not moved since. Preparation was made by JG 24 to send the RS on the ground with the stokes litter. On completion of the air strikes, Jake 75 marked the spot where the survivor was last seen. JG 24 requested smoke bombs for screening from the worst areas and Spads 11, 12 and 13 dropped white phosphorous bombs as JG 24 was initiating final approach. JG 24 established a hover over the spot marked by Jake 75 at 0538Z. The survivor could not be seen, and while Spads 11, 12 and 13 continued to drop smoke bombs and strike, JG 24 moved around in a hover in an attempt to locate the survivor. After approximately 5 minutes of searching in this manner the flight engineer saw the survivor. He was standing, but unable to move. JG 24 established a hover over the survivor, the jungle penetrator was lowered into the trees and the pick up was completed at 0545Z. During this time the Spads had continued to use smoke bombs and other ordnance, very effectively screening the hovering helicopter from nearby ridges. Considerable firing was heard while JG 24 was in the hover but no damage was taken. JG 24 left the area using the same route used for entry, and was accompanied by Spad Flight and JG 23 back to Ch 77 where the survivor was transported to NSA hospital by Pedro aircraft.

3.(C) The names of the survivors were:

E-5 Sgt Edward Sassenberger, RA19675387
E-4 Wilbert Foreman, US54441031
PFC John C. Colonna, US61002941

4. (U) Additional aircraft were:

Spad Flight (A-1Hs)
Spad 11 - Maj Richard Ives
Spad 12 - Maj Richard L. Russell
Spad 13 - Maj John T. Gaffney

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after 12 years

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Spad 23 - Pilot unknown
Spad 24 - Pilot unknown

Jake Flight (O-2s) FACS

Jake 70 - Pilot unknown

Jake 75 - Pilot unknown

Numerous A-4s made strikes, call signs and number of aircraft unknown.

5. (U) Crew members of the Jolly Greens were:

JOLLY GREEN 28

Major Billy J. Wingfield

Capt Harry W. Hagen Jr.

SSgt Elmer L. Holden

Sgt Martin E. Roepstorff

RCC

RCCP

FE

RS

JOLLY GREEN 24

Major Dale Oderman

Capt Ronald G. Spray

SSgt John Enriquez

Sgt Angus C. McDougall

JOLLY GREEN 23

RCC John D. Oliver, Capt

RCCP Charles R. Klinkert, Lt Col

FE James A. Bowers, SSgt

RS Nathaniel Smith Jr, TSgt

BILLY J. WINGFIELD, Major, USAF
Rescue Crew Commander

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GROUP 4

Downgraded at 3 year
intervals; declassified
after 12 years

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'Puny' Beret Lauded

HQ. MAC, SCOTT AFB, Ill.—Considered "too puny," a 21-year-old pararescueman did such a man-sized war-time job, he has collected a chestful of medals.

"I knew I was going over there a kid. I just wanted to come back a man . . ." Thus did Sgt. Martin E. (Marty) Roepstorff characterize his Vietnam tour.

At five feet eight and 150 pounds, he was considered too puny for the job of saving downed pilots and aircrewmembers as a member of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service's famed Maroon Berets, the elite pararescue specialists.

Yet that was what he wanted to do. "They told me I wouldn't make it when I volunteered for pararescue training," he said. "But I've always been tops at whatever I tried. I'll have to admit, though, that I had some second thoughts about jumping out of a perfectly good aircraft."

But jump he did—enough to earn him the Silver Star for gallantry, the Distinguished Flying Cross and first oak leaf cluster for heroism, and the first, second and third oak leaf clusters for the Air Medal for meritorious achievement. Presentation was made here recently, by Lt. Gen. James W. Wilson, vice commander, Military Airlift Command.

There are but 360 men in the Air Force qualified to wear the maroon beret.

Roepstorff flew 282 missions in Southeast Asia during his 13-month tour, most of them as a crewman aboard HH-3E "Jolly Green Giant" helicopters, already a legend in valor.

Most of the missions were over enemy territory. Roepstorff took part in 18 "saves"—18 men who were in danger of death or capture if they weren't pulled free and lifted to safety. Three times he let himself down on a rescue hoist (a cable with an arrow-like forest penetrator at the end) from a helicopter to help make a save. They were anything but routine.

On one mission, when he got close to the ground, "I could see big stakes and punji sticks all around. I told the helicopter to leave when I got off the hoist."

He moved a short distance and fell into a deep hole. "I thought it was the end," he said. "The hole was full of thick thorn bushes. It took me 20 minutes to get out."

He found one man, cut in half, and the charred remains of the Army Chinook helicopter. Roepstorff set out in a search pattern around the helicopter to locate the other man.

"About 30 yards away I found him. Then I heard shooting nearby. I knew that the friendly personnel who had joined in the search and I would have to get out fast.

"The man I found had a severe chest injury and fractures of an arm and both legs. I grabbed him and ran."

Roepstorff's party was the center of enemy attention, and the young sergeant provided covering rifle fire as other members of the party were reeled into the hovering helicopter in the face of intense fire and grenades.

"You don't think about it at the time," Roepstorff said. "It's a job, and you just can't think about it. If you do, you're no good to anybody."

"Why do we do it?" he asks. "It's hard to put into words what it feels like to save a life. They often cry when they are safe, and you end up with tears in your eyes, too. But it's just nothing like it."

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