

Section Title = Master 02 SAR

Dear Mrs. Newman,

I had the good fortune of meeting your son, Thomas, recently in Southeast Asia. Our meeting was unexpected, but needless to say, very fortunate for me. I am the Vice Commander of the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing based in Korat, Thailand. We fly the F-105, a single seated fighter used to bomb and strafe enemy forces in North Vietnam. On the 30th of May, I was hit by enemy fire during a strafing attack. Shortly after being hit, my aircraft burst into flames and went out of control. I was required to bail out over enemy held territory. I ejected at about 500 mph and as a result, the windblast broke my right arm and dislocated my left arm at the elbow. While descending in my parachute I crashed through tall trees. This injured my left leg and made it extremely difficult to stand. Upon reaching the ground, I used my emergency radio and learned that the air rescue helicopter was enroute to my position. Since there were enemy troops near me, I left the area where I had landed and hid myself in the dense jungle.

Your son, Thomas, arrived overhead in a helicopter about an hour and a half later. Because I was unable to ride the lifting cable unassisted, I requested help. Tom volunteered to be lowered through the dense tree coverage into unfriendly territory with no idea of what he could expect underneath. After he was on the ground, the helicopter which lowered him was forced to withdraw. Tom and I were alone on the ground with enemy troops drawing closer and closer. He calmly directed a second helicopter to our position and meanwhile made me comfortable and maintained an alert eye out for enemy troops.

When the second helicopter arrived it lowered an excessive amount of cable. As Tom tried to prepare me to ride the lifting device, a loop of the cable ensnared his ankle and lifted him into the air feet first. Torn remained calm in this very awkward and dangerous position and was fortunate to be lowered fairly close to the ground before the loop slipped and he fell head first to the forest floor sustaining a sprain to one wrist. Tom took the entire incident in stride and acted as though nothing had happened. He calmly secured me to the penetrator and straddling my legs, wrapped his arms around me so that I could not fall off as we were pulled up through the tree-tops into the hovering helicopter.

From that point on the story is no longer exciting. I have taken this opportunity to write to you so that you would know of and appreciate your son's courageous and selfless actions. His kind of heroism in our rescue forces is what keeps our fighter pilots going. We have full confidence that the young men like Tom who serve in the air rescue units will spare no effort and will do everything possible to help us when we are downed by enemy action. Being a father of four children, three of them teenaged daughters, and one ten year old boy, I can only say I hope my boy will grow up to be as brave a young man as your son is. As his mother, you have every right to feel very proud of your son.¹

The above letter was written on 24 June 1968 by Col. Norman P. Phillips. When he was shot down, the Col. was using the callsign "Master 02." The HH-3E helicopter that lowered Tom to the ground was Jolly 36 and was assigned to Det. 1 40 ARRS based at NKP, Thailand. It was crewed by Capt. James Platt (pilot), Maj. Paul Regan (copilot), and A1C Narcisco Otero (FE). The HH-53 that recovered Sgt. Newman and Col. Phillips was Jolly 70. This "Super Jolly" was

assigned to the 40th ARRS based at Udorn RTAFB Thailand and was crewed by Capt. Alfred Montrem (pilot), Maj. Aharon Aharonian (copilot), TSgt Robert Hollen (FE), Sgt. Richard Lavery (HM), and Sgts. Larry Palmer and David Kratz (PJs). After each mission, the pilot of the rescue helicopter was required by written directives to write a formal mission report. On rare occasions, the PJ also wrote a post mission report. PJ reports were not required by higher headquarters and were only written when the PJ thought one was necessary. Fortunately for historians, Pararescueman Tom Newman decided this was one of the instances where a PJ report was necessary. Published below, his report describes in detail the situation many PJs found themselves in when they were lowered to the ground to recover a downed pilot.

MISSION REPORT 31 MAY 68, Sgt. Thomas A. Newman²

On 30 May 68, we were scrambled to aid an F-105 pilot who had ejected over hostile territory. We took off from NKP in an HH-3E Jolly Green Giant. During the flight to his position, we were notified that he had sustained a broken arm and that he would require assistance in getting on the forest penetrator. While checking my equipment, I discovered that the helmet connection to my radio was inoperative. I decided that although there would be an element of danger, it would be to my advantage to leave my helmet behind so that I could maintain two-way communications.

Upon arriving in the area, a brief aerial search was made and the survivor was located. I relieved myself of my safety harness, parachute, and helmet and was lowered to the ground by the flight engineer. I also left my medical kit, as I expected to just grab the survivor, get him on the hoist, and get out of there. I immediately established radio contact with the aircraft and looked around for the survivor. When I couldn't see him, I began an expanding circle search pattern trying to locate him. After one circuit without success, I decided to have the aircraft depart the area, as they had been picking up ground fire from the ridges above me. I radioed them three times to raise the cable and depart the area before my message was received.

As the helicopter pulled out, the penetrator became entangled in the dense brush, but was pulled free. I didn't know it at the time, but when the penetrator tore free of the trees, it snapped up and half-hitched around the landing gear taking my aircraft out of commission. As my HH-3 flew over the ridge I was on, they were subjected to very heavy automatic weapons fire.

Suddenly there was a blast and I saw a muzzle flash in my right peripheral vision. I hit the ground and almost opened fire in the direction of the shot. But as I did not have a specific target, I decided that it would be better not to chance a miss and give away my position. I crawled a few feet toward the shot to get a better look, and the person fired again. This time I could make out a person. I had him in my rifle sight picture and was squeezing the trigger when it occurred to me that his shot hadn't been fired in my direction. I then thought it might be the survivor and held my fire. I yelled, "Hey!" Keeping him in my sights. Had he made the slightest move in my direction I would have fired, as I still could not make out who it was. He sat perfectly still and yelled back, "Up here!" As I was still not sure whether or not he was friend or foe, I let him see a little movement from where I was by shaking the bushes with my foot. When he still didn't fire at me, I moved to come at him from his behind.

As I came up to him, the first thing I did was to take away his weapon. He had been firing tracer rounds from it to signal the helicopter when it was leaving. Then I cut him out of his G-suit and unnecessary survival gear. Throughout this time, there were occasional bursts of small and automatic weapons fire from the hill and ridge above us. After each burst the pilot would tell me, "that's only the fighters, that's only the fighters!" I knew that it was enemy forces, but let the pilot believe what he would. He told me later that he knew it was enemy fire too, but was afraid I might leave if I knew it. None of their shots came within several yards of us so it was obvious that they were only trying to flush us out, and shooting at the aircraft.

It was now getting darker and we could hear people moving through the brush searching for us. To flush us out, they fired their rifles sporadically through the brush. If I called the Jolly in now, they would be subject to close-range ground fire and would also give away our position. So, I radioed the helicopter and told them that I was closing communications so that the enemy could not find us by hearing my radio static. I told them I would be off the radio for 10-20 minutes. I then shut off my radio, got the pilot closer to the ground and a little more comfortable, and watched the shadows for movement. The end man in the enemy sweep came closer than 50 ft of where we were hiding behind a fallen tree.

After a while, the noises in the brush ceased as the enemy searched elsewhere. I radioed the chopper and told them we were ready for pick-up. As the HH-3E came in, they received very little small arms fire. I talked them in until they were directly over head, and told them to lower the cable. As they complied, I glanced away for a moment and when I looked back, the helicopter had drifted about ten yards downhill and to the left, and I could no longer see the penetrator. I figured that they had probably raised it into the aircraft to make the corrections I had given them. When I realized that the penetrator was on the ground, I decided that it would be easier to move the pilot than to have them move the aircraft.

I got my arm under Col. Philips shoulder and around him and helped him to where the cable came through the trees. In the darkness, I couldn't see the penetrator, so I tried to follow the cable to it. The area was covered with vines the same size as the cable and as the cable was lying in coils on the grounds I couldn't tell one from the other. I radioed the chopper and asked them to take up the slack. I must have been standing in a couple of coils of the cable. When the hoist retracted some cable, it tightened around my ankle and jerked me off my feet causing me to drop my radio and weapon. By this time, at least one enemy soldier had moved to within 75 yards of our position and I could hear him firing at the aircraft. I tried to grab my weapon but it was tangled in the vines and I couldn't reach it before I was pulled up through the trees by my right ankle.

As I was pulled through the first tree, the branches were catching me and it felt as if my right foot was being torn from my leg. Finally, I was pulled through by sheer force, and up into another tree which I went through more easily. Once I was through that, I pulled in my radio, which was dangling beneath me by the lanyard that attached it to me. Trying to sound calm and still be heard above the roar of the helicopter, I radioed them that I was tangled in the cable and wanted to be lowered to the ground. By now, I was about 70-80 feet in the air and within 20 feet of the helicopter. The hoist operator began to lower me, still hanging upside down by my right ankle. As I went through the first layer of trees, I narrowly missed being impaled on a dead tree

trunk. As I went through the second canopy, the thick branches slowed my descent, the cable slacked around my ankle, and I fell about the last 20 feet to the ground. When I hit, my face dug into the ground. I broke my fall with my hands, and did a quick medical self assessment. My left wrist hurt pretty bad, but I could move it. My right ankle hurt a lot and was badly wrenched from my upside down hoisting. When I fell, the cable slid around my ankle like a belay rope. It wore grooves through my boot and sock, and into my ankle. The ankle was bleeding a little in spite of being partially cauterized. The good news was that it was not broken.

I put the pain in my ankle out of mind, checked to see if the survivor was OK, and did a quick search for my weapon as the V.C. that had moved in close was still firing in our direction. After a few minutes, I gave up, drew my pistol, and moved to the pilot who was now clutching the penetrator and shouting, "I've got it, I've got it!" He had one seat under his leg. I pulled down the other two and situated us on it. I got his worst arm in between him and the penetrator in his lap and explained to him that I would sit on top, straddling him and hold him on. When this was done, I radioed the aircraft and told them that we were ready to be pulled in. I repeated that three times before we were finally lifted off the ground. On the way up through the trees, I pulled the survivor in to the penetrator as close as possible, locking my arms around him, and trying to protect him from the branches. I totally forgot about the safety straps; the only thing holding us on was me.

There was a lot going on. I didn't notice – or care – that the rescue chopper was an HH-53 from Udorn. PJ Larry "Squatty Body" Palmer was operating the hoist. While on the way up, I remember seeing muzzle flashes from the ground and hearing enemy small arms fire and return fire from the Super Jolly's mini-guns. As soon as we were clear of the trees, the chopper flew away with us still hanging below on the hoist cable. In a few more minutes we were inside the helicopter and out of the area. Once aboard, I gave the survivor 1cc of codeine IM. The HH-53's PJs helped with other medical treatment. Splints were applied to his left arm and leg, a wound on his head was cleaned, he was treated for shock, and we made him as comfortable as possible. Because the HH-53's PJs were focusing on treating the survivor, and because Sgt. Newman failed to let them know that he was also injured, no one treated his injuries. Tom was a typical PJ and his relatively minor injuries were not a high priority to him.

Sgt. Newman made these comments about their return to base. Upon arrival at NKP, no one met us except an ambulance which took the survivor to the dispensary. I had only been in country for a couple of months and figured that this reception must be normal. I walked alone across the flight line to my hooch and immediately went to bed. The next morning, I got up, reported to work, and was surprised at how everyone was staring at me. I was told to go to the dispensary. There the medics looked at my wrist and ankle, treated my injuries and I visited Col. Phillips. The base took some pictures of us and I gave him a "Rescued by Jolly Green" pin.³ It had been a day to remember and Sergeant Newman and Colonel Phillips would never forget it.



Photo courtesy of Thomas Newman

Photo = NKP Newman Phillips2.bmp

Tom Newman (left) and Norman Phillips in the NKP hospital. Tom's left arm is splinted due to minor injuries when he was dropped off of the hoist cable

The pilot of Jolly Green 37, which recovered Tom and rescued the survivor, had this to say about the mission. *When Jolly 36 pulled off and departed the area, its pilot radioed that his hoist was inoperative. We immediately left our high orbit at 9500 feet and dropped down to a lower altitude. The sun was setting and we wanted to make the pickup before sunset. During our descent, we made several radio calls to the PJ on the ground but received no answer. We were also hit by small arms fire but continued in for a pickup. Just before total darkness we went into a hover over the survivors last known position. Sergeant Newman came up on radio and provided information that allowed us to set up a hover over him.*

The hover location was below the surrounding ridges, in a steep ravine with heavily wooded slopes. We took some minor small arms fire and returned fire with the minigun. The darkness and with no lights illuminated on the helicopter may have prevented the enemy the ability to see and shoot at us. All 240 feet of hoist cable was used to get the penetrator on the ground. The hoist operator could not see through the trees and waited for the cable to shake or a radio call from Newman to reel them in. The hoist operator waited several minutes until he felt a tug on the cable. He began to reel in and continued until we received a radio call from Newman telling us to lower cable. We were unaware that he was entangled in the cable but we complied with his instructions. The next radio call from the PJ was to "raise me slowly." At 7 p.m. and in now total darkness, the men on the penetrator emerged from the treetops and they were pulled into the helicopter.⁴

When Tom later wondered why the enemy did not shoot him as he was dangling defenselessly upside down on the hoist cable, he concluded that they were probably laughing too hard. This mission was a success because of the great team effort using HH-3's Jolly Greens 36 and 20, Sandy's 5, 6, 7 and 8, Nails 54 and 64, HH-53 Jolly Green 70, and HC-130 Crown 1.

Weeks later, Sergeant Newman became the third living enlisted man to be awarded the Air

Force Cross. As Gen. Howell M. Estes, Jr. pinned the nation's second highest award on Sergeant Newman's chest, the words of the citation captured a little of the spirit of Newman's Memorial Day. "Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship, and aggressiveness, Sergeant Newman reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force."

¹ Letter, Col. Norman P. Philips to Mrs. Newman 24 June 1968. Copy provided to Robert LaPointe from the personal records of Thomas Newman.

² Sgt. Thomas A. Newman. Pararescue Mission Report, 31 May 1968. Copy provided to Robert LaPointe from the personal records of Thomas Newman.

³ Email Tom Newman to Robert LaPointe, 23 November 2002. On file in LaPointe archives.

⁴ Capt. Alfred Montrem. 40th ARRS Mission Report #1-3-56, 30 May 1968. In USAF Collection, AFHRA