

In the attempted rescue of "Hellborne 215" and the downing of Jolly Green 23, twenty-five different units were directly involved.

Aircraft: HH-3E

Call sign:

Jolly Green 22

Jolly Green 23 (crashed)

Jolly Green 24

Jolly Green 27

Jolly Green 28

Jolly Green 33

Aircraft: A-1E Skyraider

Call sign:

Sandy 9

Sandy 10

Rescue helicopters were escorted by specially-trained pilots flying propeller-driven A-1E Skyraiders (call sign *Sandy*). These adaptable aircraft were used as escorts for rescue helicopters on recovery missions for downed crew members, providing fire suppression to hold the enemy at bay while the helicopters performed the rescue.

Aircraft: A-1H Skyraider

Call sign:

Spad 01

Spad 02

The A-1 was known as the Spad when not dedicated to the role of search and rescue escort. While Sandys would escort and remain with the Jolly Greens, sometimes the

need for some extra suppression was called for and Spads would be called in to soften up the area.

Aircraft: Cessna O-2 Skymaster

Call sign:

Trail 33

Trail 35

Trail 36

Trails were assigned the 20th TASS and flew out of Quang Tri and Hue.

Aircraft: Huey Helicopter Gunship

Call sign

Scarface 6-1

Scarface 6-2

Marine Huey Helicopter Gunships from the Marine Observation Squadrons (VMO-3) which was assigned to Hue / Phu Bai at the time of the rescue attempt. At full strength the unit had 33 officers, 194 enlisted, 12 Huey gunships and 6 slicks. The Hueys were often called in to cover other units and used the call sign "Scarface."

Aircraft: Grumman A-6A Intruder

Call sign:

Ringneck 528

The Grumman A-6 Intruder is a two-man all weather, low-altitude, carrier based attack plane, with versions adapted as aerial tanker and electronic warfare platform. The A-6A primarily flew close air support, all weather and night attacks on enemy troop concentrations, and night interdiction missions.

Aircraft: Navy F-8 or F-4 Phantom

Call sign:

Gunfighter 7

Gunfighter 8

These were assigned the 366th TAC Fighter Wing, DaNang, USAF and could also be called in for additional suppression support.

Aircraft: UH-1E Huey Gunships

Call sign

Seaworthy 4-1

Seaworthy 4-2

These gunships were assigned to the Marine Observation Squadron VMO-6. At the time of the rescue efforts the unit was operating from Quang Tri Air Base and using the call sign Seaworthy.

The UH-1E Huey helicopter gunships were armed versions of the Huey also used to carry troops into combat. They were equipped with two (one on each side) forward pointing M-60 machine guns along with a pod of seven 2.5 inch rockets, that were aimed and fired by the pilot. In the open doorways of each side were M-60 machine guns used by door gunners.

Aircraft: *Fast Movers*

Call sign

Cheetah

Chippie

Cheetah was an F-4Cs of the 433 TFSq, 8th TAC Ftr Wg, Ubon, Thailand (USAF)

The F-4C Phantom was the workhorse of the tactical air support fleet. These jet fighter-bombers had a range of 1,000 miles at speeds up to 1,400 mph and could carry a payload: 16,000 lbs.

Aircraft: HC-130P

Callsign:

Crown 1

Crown 2

Besides serving as helicopter refuelers, these HC-130Ps carried mission coordinators whose job it was to assemble and manage the Search and Rescue Task Force (SARTF) of helicopters, escort fighters, and tankers. "Crown" directed the Jollys to the downed flyer, as well as to their refueling rendezvous points. They also acted as a communication link between rescue forces and higher echelons. Many missions required lengthy helicopter holding times adjacent to a survivor's location while escorting A-1 "Sandy" and jet aircraft bombed and strafed enemy positions to "sanitize" the area for pickup.

To reduce response time following a shoot-down, the Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Service designated four helicopter refueling orbits. Two were over the Laotian-North Vietnamese border, one was located over central Laos, and the fourth was east, over the Gulf of Tonkin. HC-130P crews established holding patterns prior to U.S. air strikes to immediately support combat SAR helicopters.

King - An HC-130P airborne command post.

Queen - The Rescue Control Center (R CC) at Da Nang

Joker - was the Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) at TSN

The Last Mission of Hellborne 215

Jolly Greens Take Flight

At 10:26, Crown 01, which was on orbit for air refueling of a Jolly Green at position Tango (flying over the Gulf of Tonkin) received a call reporting Hellborne 215 down.

When word was received of the downed pilot at the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron in Da Nang, two HH-3Es were scrambled. Jolly Green 22 piloted by Major Arthur J. Anderson took off five minutes later. Jolly Green 23, was delayed and took off 15 minutes later.

At the controls of Jolly Green 23 was Coast Guard LT Jack C. Rittichier along with a USAF crew consisting of Captain Richard C. Yeend, Jr, co-pilot; SSGT Elmer L. Holden, flight engineer; and SGT James D. Locker, pararescueman.

Soon the Jolly Greens met up with their escorts, Spad 01 and Spad 02. Also enroute were Scarface 6-1 and Scarface 6-2, FACs Trail 35, Trail 33 and Trail 36. They were all headed for the A Shau Valley. The first FAC to arrive in the area spotted Schmidt under his parachute. Through voice contact, Schmidt reported that he had a broken right leg and a left arm and that he would need help.

Trail 35 reported that there was ground fire in the area as well as bunkers and trucks.

It was determined that it was too dangerous for the Jollies and Spads to enter the area until it was made safe. In the meantime, they would hold their positions to the northwest.

Hellborne 522, Ringneck 528, Gunfighter 7 and Gunfighter 8 hit the area several times under the direction of the FAC. By 11:40 the Jollies and Spads were brought into the area for the first pick-up attempt. Around noon, Jolly Green 22 located Schmidt a few yards from a road. With Jolly Green 23 flying high, Jolly Green 22 descended into the area in a spiraling right turn, jettisoning its tip tanks and dumping fuel in preparation for a high altitude rescue. The two Scarface gunships covered the Jolly as it descended. Soon, Jolly Green 22 received heavy enemy ground fire from the valley floor and surrounding ridges. The pilot felt his Jolly Green had been hit and pulled up in a steep left turn.

After determining that his aircraft was OK, the pilot again attempted the rescue, this time with a straight in approach from the northwest, trying to avoid the enemy ground fire area.

As the pilot pulled Jolly Green 22 into a hover, extremely heavy ground fire erupted, most of it coming from the ridge to the left of the helicopter. The door gunners from the Jolly Green returned the fire as the pilot pulled out of the area.

Jolly Green 22 returned to an orbit position as the FAC called in additional ground strikes.

After about 20 minutes of intense fire suppression activity, Jolly Green 22 once again joined the two Scarface gunships and Spads, 01 and 02 for another rescue attempt.

Once again as Jolly Green 22 slowed to a hover, ground fire erupted, but this time it was coming from literally every direction, from the hillside above to the ravine below and from the front and back of Jolly Green 22. Once again the pilot pulled the craft up and out of harms way, returning to orbit a safe distance away.

Jolly Green Hit

More suppression strikes were ordered in, however, now Jolly Green 22 was low on fuel. Trail 36 asked Rittichier, at the controls of Jolly Green 23 if he would be able to make the rescue attempt. Rittichier replied that he would and that he would use the Scarface gunships as his high cover. Jolly Green 22 remained in the area until it was critically low on fuel and was forced to depart. As Jolly Green 22 headed back to refuel, he heard the radio calls of Rittichier reporting heavy gunfire and relaying the directions of the incoming fire to the Spads and gunships.

Rittichier continued his approach under fire until initiating a hover over the survivor at which time he decided the attempt was futile.

Jolly Green 23 came around for a second try. What happened next was witnessed by Lt. Col Robert C. Dubois, USAF (Ret.) who was Trail 33 (FAC): (As published on [Tom Pilsch's](#) Web site "[The Search for Jolly Green 23](#)".)

I remember it [Hellborne 215 parachute] being on the north side of the east west section of road that ran into Laos and it was hung up in a tree. I never actually saw the A-4 pilot but understood he was in the bushes next to the chute and was injured and could not move.

After the fighters had put down suppression ordinance Jolly Green 23 said he was going in for an attempted pick up. Jolly Green 23 went into a hover over the A-4 pilot and turned to face the west. The PJ was on the wire being lowered when Jolly Green 23 reported that he was taking fire. I saw fire coming out of the left side near the engine and told Jolly Green 23 that he had a fire on the left side.

He started pulling out and I advised him that there was a clearing 1,000 meters North if he had to set down. He said he was going for the clearing.

The fire appeared to extinguish and I advised Jolly Green 23 of that. He said he was going to set it down as he reached the clearing. He was in a descent but still above the height of the trees along the edge of the clearing when the main rotor stopped turning. The Jolly Green 23 hit the ground and burst into flames that consumed anything that looked like an aircraft.

After refueling and a quick check for battle damage, Jolly Green 22 returned to the area. Enroute, Anderson asked the status of the mission and was informed that Jolly Green 23 had crashed and that there were no survivors.

Although four people were now dead, Schmidt was still alive and needed to be rescued. Jolly Green 28, commanded by Capt. Jerry M. Griggs, arrived on scene at 1:20 p.m. and orbited for an hour before being cleared to attempt another rescue. Jolly Greens 22

and 24 flew high cover while the two Huey gunships, Sandy 9 and Sandy 10, as well as Seaworthy 4-1 and Seaworthy 4-2 were flying close cover.

Jolly Green 28 came in for a rescue attempt and pulled into a hover, as it did so, it was hit with server ground fire from all directions. Griggs made a diving exit as the crew of the Jolly Green 28 returned the fire.

As Jolly Green 28 was pulling out of the area, the fire warning light for the number two engines and it experienced a drop in power. Other aircraft in the area reported smoke coming from the number two engine. Jolly Green 28 was now in trouble. With only one engine, it didn't have the power to clear the mountains in the area. Jolly Green 24, commanded by Major Harvie L. Stringer, came down to escort Jolly Green 28 out of the area by following the road. Trail 36 lead the way while Sandy 9 and Sandy 10 flew cover.

But as the group followed the road, they were coming under heavy ground fire. Griggs needed to get Jolly Green 28 higher so it could clear the 3,700 feet ridgeline for a quick exit out of the valley. He ordered the crew of Jolly Green 28 to begin throwing everything possible out of the helicopter in order to lighten it. But Jolly Green 28 kept loosing altitude as Griggs maneuver the helicopter to avoid enemy ground fire. Somehow, Jolly Green 28 was able to regain the necessary altitude and crossed the ridge out of the valley. A short time later, Griggs landed Jolly Green 28 at Kha Sanh.

Meanwhile, Stringer landed Jolly Green 24 for refueling and then returned to the rescue mission.

The Rescue Attempt Continues

During this time, numerous air strikes were made to suppress the ground fire. At 3:15 p.m. Crown 1 was relieved by Crown 2 and Hellborne 215 had been on the ground, wounded, for four hours.

Sandy 9 and 10 flew over the area to evaluate the around before another Jolly Green came in. There was no ground fire. Jolly Green 22 was low on fuel so Crown 2 suggested that Jolly Green 24 make the attempt. While Jolly Green 22 was still in the area, Jolly Green 24 made an approach. Stringer pulled the helicopter into a hover, and just as he did, flight engineer SSGT Robert H. Baldwin called, "Pull off, Ground Fire!" as he began to return fire himself. Ground fire was erupting from every possible angle, but now it also included fire from .50 caliber machine guns.

Stringer immediately pulled the craft up to exit. But this time the North Vietnamese grounds troops were ready for him. He was headed directly into an ambush of heavy ground fire. Stringer turned the helicopter to the right and dove down a ridgeline only to fly directly into ground fire once again. Apparently the pervious air attack had done little to soften up the enemy. In fact they had had time to bring in more and heavier guns.

Stringer advised Trail 33 and Crown 2 that the area was still hot. That ground fire was coming from the ridge to the right of Hellborn 215 and from spider holes (which the Vietnamese troops used like bunkers) immediately below the road.

Jolly Green 27, commanded by Major Stuart H. Hoag, arrived on scene and Stringer advised him that the area was still hot with automatic weapons fire 20 to 30 yards both north and south of the Hellborne 215. Also that Hellborne 215 was not moving and that radio contact had been lost. Any more attempts would have to wait.

Stringer on Jolly Green 24 left the scene to refuel. While on the ground he called Queen by telephone and passed his evaluation and recommendations.

At 4:45 p.m. Jolly Green 27, flying low and Jolly Green 33, flying high, arrived back on scene and shortly thereafter, Jolly Green 22 also returned. All three orbited the area as the site was again hit with [CBU-19](#) (a tear gas like agent) and napalm.

The crews on the Jollies circling overhead were instructed to put on their gas masks in preparation for the use of the [CBU-19](#), however all three crews experienced the same problem in that the microphone fittings in that the gas masks were not compatible with the crew helmets. If they used the masks, no voice communications would be possible either inside their helicopter among the crew or with other aircraft engaged in the rescue attempt.

The crew of Jolly Green 33 came up with an alternate plan. The flight engineer SGT David Rodriguez volunteered to remove his helmet and use a headset, with which the gas mask was compatible. The pararescuemen, SGT Ernest D. Casbeer, used an older type gas mask, which was compatible with his helmet. The co-pilot, Captain Paul D. Ashley devised a method of transmitting by putting his mike on his larynx. The pilot, Captain William E. Brennan had a different mike and was unable to jury rig any method of using it. The crew had devised a method of communications that would allow for the use of the CBU-19 and perhaps enable them to rescue Hellborne 215 on the ground.

[CBU-19](#) was dropped on both sides of the Hellborne 215. Jolly Green 33 began its approach and entered a hover. However, in spite of the use of the CBU-19, in just seconds, Jolly Green 33 was driven off by ground fire. But in those few seconds of hovering, the flight engineer spotted Hellborne 215 lying on the ground partially covered by his parachute. The engineer could see that he was lying on his back with one leg under him, which appeared broken. He was not moving.

Jolly Green 33, left the area to refuel. While refueling, Jolly Greens 22, 27 and 33 received a message from Crown 2 to return to base. It was 6:30 p.m. and Hellborne 215 had been on the ground for a little over eight hours. The missions had been cancelled.

At dawn the next day, a ground team was inserted into the area. During their search in and around where Hellborne 215 had landed, no trace of him or his parachute could be found. All attempts to re-establish radio contact with him also proved futile. Under the circumstances, formal search and rescue efforts were concluded, Walter R. Schmidt, Jr. was listed as a Prisoner of War.

Attempts to Locate the Crash Site

Air Force Looks for Missing Copter

The Associated Press - Nov 14, 1998

HURLBURT FIELD, Fla. (AP) -- The Air Force is hoping flight simulations can help solve the disappearance 30 years ago of a rescue helicopter in Vietnam.

The project may lead to similar efforts to find other aircraft that vanished during the Vietnam War, former flight engineer Bob Baldwin said Wednesday as the nation marked Veterans Day.

Baldwin is part of a team of veterans teaming up with the Air Force to find an HH-3E Jolly Green Giant and its four-man crew. The helicopter named Jolly Green 23 vanished June 9, 1968, while searching for a downed attack pilot, who also remains unaccounted for.

Baldwin was part of the wartime effort to find the helicopter. Thirty years later, he's helping with a new search despite being thousands of miles away from the scene. Black and white aerial photos taken in the late 1960s were converted into digital photos and matched with current maps to recreate the wartime landscape near the Vietnam-Laos border. Baldwin then used a computer joy stick to fly through the scene displayed on a console. "I just closed my eyes and when I opened them up, it was like stepping back 30 years," Baldwin said. "The only thing missing is that the tracers aren't coming at you" from antiaircraft guns.

The simulations at the Hurlburt base in the Florida Panhandle allowed Baldwin and another former pilot to pick out three spots where the helicopter may have crashed.

A military team in Vietnam searched for four days before the monsoon season forced them to stop. They plan to resume when the rains end next year, said Maj. Mike Vaughn, who helps supervise computer mapping and flight simulator work at Hurlburt.

The team found no sign of Jolly Green 23, but did find wreckage of a Marine helicopter that had been forced down. All but one of the crew members had escaped.

Epilogue

In early 1973, during Operation Homecoming, the communists released 591 American Prisoners of War. In conjunction with Operation Homecoming, the North Vietnamese released a list of American Prisoners of War who they state died in captivity. Walter Schmidt was not included in this list of Americans who died while under the control of the communists.

In April 1991 the U.S. government released a list of Prisoners of War and Missing in Action who were known to be alive in enemy hands and for whom there is no evidence that he or she died in captivity. This list, commonly referred to today as the USG's "Last Known Alive" list, includes 1st Lt. Walter Schmidt.

Rittichier's widow, the former Carol Ann Laux, remarried several years after his death to another Coast Guard Aviator, who retired as a commander in 1980. They currently live in California

In the Vietnam war, 8,000 Coast Guardsmen served in combat or direct support roles. Of those, seven were killed and 60 were wounded. LT Jack C. Rittichier is the only Coast Guardsmen whose body has not been recovered.

On October 12, 1991, a villager turned in to the "Office PA15 - Public Security", Dong Ngi Province, Vietnam, a dog tag and remains reportedly belonging to Lt. Rittichier. The information on the dog tag correlates with the correct data for Jack Rittichier. That information was provided to U.S. personnel, however, the dog tag and remains were not turned over by the Vietnamese. There was no information provided by the villager as to the fate of the other crewmen.

In his honor, the Integrated Support Command in Portsmouth, VA, commissioned its Administration and Electronic Systems Support Unit building the Rittichier Building, during a formal ceremony held November 10, 1998. A hangar at Coast Guard Air Station Detroit is also dedicated in his honor.



58 W -- Line 14

If you visit the **Vietnam Veterans Memorial** in Washington D.C., go to Panel Number 58W and look at line 14. There you'll find the name of LT Jack C. Rittichier. Nearby

you'll find the names of those who died with him that day SSG Elmer Larry Holden, line 9; SGT James Douglas Locker, line 10 and CPT Richard C. Yeend, Jr., line 17.

Tom Pilsch's Web site provided much of the background information on the crash of Jolly Green 23 and is an excellent site to learn about the latest in the search efforts to find the crash site of Jolly Green 23.

Crash Site Today
Photos by PA2 Lauren Smith, USCG

An aerial of the crash site in Laos. Just below the center of the photo is the rotor head from Jolly Green 23.



Serial numbers from the rotor head at right proved without a doubt that this is the crash of Jolly Green 23.





Local Laotians villagers helped to excavate the area looking for remains of the crew.



A buckle, pocket knife and lieutenant's bars were some of the personal effect found at the site.

Lt. Jack Rittichier Comes Home



It was a ceremony that was long overdue. After waiting 35 years, family, friends and a country were finally able to put to rest the Coast Guard's only MIA of the Vietnam War at Arlington National Cemetery, October 6, 2003..

Lt. Jack C. Rittichier was laid to rest in on was it called "Coast Guard Hill" on the southern edge of the cemetery. With hundreds of military officials, family and well-wishers, Rittichier was finally home.

With full military honors including a horse-drawn caisson, a helicopter fly-over by four Coast Guard helicopters and 21-gun salute, there was no question that this was a burial for an American hero.

With the folding of an the American flag, a country says thank you and goodbye. Minutes later the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Thomas H. Collins, presented the flag to David Rittichier, brother of Lt. Jack Rittichier.



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