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1400003 68-3246

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FROM: 370

27 November 1968

SUBJECT: MISSION NARRATIVE REPORT (1-3-120-83307) (U) GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION
SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
AUTOMATICALLY DOWNGRADED AT TWO
YEAR INTERVALS
DECLASSIFIED ON 31 DEC 94

TO: 37C

3rd ARRGp (JSARC) JES
IN TURN

1. (U) This report is submitted IAW ARRS 55-2/3 ARRGp Sup 1, dated 15 June 1968.

2. (C) At 2250Z, 25 Nov 68 Queen notified the Da Nang alert crews (Jolly Green 34 and 32) to stand by at Jolly Green Operations for a possible mission. The alert crews arrived at operations at 2305Z and were scrambled for a mission at 270/85 Ch 77. Jolly Green 34 and 32 were airborne at 2315Z with Spad 11 and 12 as escort. Queen advised all SAR forces that Covey 227 and 265 had crashed in an O-2 and that Covey 267 had voice contact with one survivor (Covey 227). No contact had been made with Covey 265. Panama gave vectors and flight following service to Jolly Green's enroute to the crash site. Jolly Green 32 joined Jolly Green 34 at FL 080 and proceeded enroute. At approximately 2345Z the position of Covey 227 was refined to 002/22/72 by Spad 11 who was orbiting the survivors position. Jolly Green's arrived at the crash site at 0010Z and held at FL 080 to allow Spad's to check out the area and get an exact position on the survivor. The weather enroute was 6000' undercast, 15+ visibility. Weather at the crash site was clear except for fog in valleys and low stratus around the scene of the survivor. The undercast condition terminated approximately eight miles east of the SAR scene. At 0017 Spad 11 advised that the area looked good for a pickup attempt and Jolly Green 34 began a decent with Spad 11 leading into the survivors position. Jolly Green 32 (high bird) held at FL 050 over the pickup point. Internal fuel had been maintained at 1000# in each main tank and $\frac{1}{2}$ mile out on final approach to the survivor, the tip tanks were jettisoned. Jolly Green 34 requested the survivor to light a smoke and immediately an orange smoke was visible about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile ahead at 12 O'Clock. Jolly Green 34 hovered over the survivor while Spad 11 and 12 made dry passes on each side of the survivors position. The pickup was completed at 0025Z with no problems. No ground fire was heard or observed throughout the mission. Radio discipline was excellent for all forces. After the pickup, Jolly Green 34 exited the area on a NE heading as recommended by Spad 11. Queen was advised that the survivor was aboard and in excellent condition. Jolly Green 34 climbed to FL 090 and orbited for 20 minutes while Spad 11 and 12, Covey 267, Nail 34 and Jolly Green 32 looked over the area for the second crew member (Covey 265). Because of low fuel remaining, Jolly Green 34 requested Crown 1 to rendezvous for A/R if it was decided to remain on scene and attempt to locate the other crew member. Queen advised that Jolly Green 34 RTB to Ch 77 and other Jolly Green's from Ch 77 would be scrambled if additional forces were required. Jolly Green 34 departed the SAR scene at 0045Z for Ch 77 escorted by Spad 03 and 04. At approximately 0045Z Spad 11 sighted a metal object on a ridge in the vicinity of the crash scene; however, they were unable to positively identify the object. Jolly Green 32 was requested to make a low pass on the area and identify the object to see if it was the crashed O-2 and if the other crew member was in the aircraft (Covey 265).

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Jolly Green 32 made a minimum altitude low pass across the area at 20KTS. The object was identified as parts of a drop tank. At 0055Z Jolly Green 32 departed the area, climbed to FL 080 and proceeded east toward Ch 77. At 0105Z Spad 11 sighted smoke rising from trees about 200 meters south of the survivors pickup point. This area had been obscured by low stratus earlier but was now clearly visible. Spad 11 believed this to be the O-2 wreckage and Jolly Green 32 was recalled to investigate the sighting. At approximately 0115Z Jolly Green 32 made a low pass across the smoke area and positively identified the wreckage as the O-2 aircraft. Another approach was made to the wreckage and a hover was established to attempt visual sighting of the second O-2 crewmember. The O-2 was upside down and appeared to have made a soft vertical landing. (The survivor, Covey 227, had stated that the aircraft was in a flat inverted spin when bailed out). The front engine was intact, cabin area completely burned out and no rear engine visible. The right tail boom was intact, left boom severely damaged with no rudder or horizontal stabilizer visible. Jolly Green 32 decided not to deploy his PJ to search the wreckage because it was still smoking and the aircraft had ordinance on board. It was determined that the second crewmember could not have survived the crash if he had remained in the cockpit because it had been completely burned out. Jolly Green 32 departed the area at 0130Z. Jolly Green 34 arrived Ch 77 at 0140Z with one survivor (Covey 227) Jolly Green 32 arrived Ch 77 at 0245Z.

3. (U) Crewmembers of Jolly Greens:

JOLLY GREEN 34 (Low)

RCC CAPT Gerald W. Moore
RCCP CAPT Joseph J. Dillon
FE SGT Robert T. Anderson
RS TSgt Nathaniel Smith Jr.

JOLLY GREEN 32 (High)

RCC MAJ Charles E. Wicker
RCCP LTCOL Lamar G. Tullos
FE TSgt Charles D. Severns
RS SGT Thomas T. Winters

4. (U) Spads were:

Spad 11

Maj James B. Wheeler

Spad 12

Maj Neal Incas

5. (U) Other aircraft assisting SAR effort:

Crown 1, Covey 267, Nail 34, Spad 03, Spad 04.

6. (U) Survivors name:

1st Lt Allen S. Sheppard III

20th TASS

GERALD W. MOORE, Capt, USAF
Rescue Crew Commander

CLASSIFICATION CANCELLED

Or Changed to

By Authority of

By

(Date)

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GROUP 4

Downgraded at 3 year
intervals; declassified
after 12 years

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SUPPORTING DOCUMENT 13

41.

Summary Report 1-3-120-8330, 25 Nov 68

(C) At 2250Z, 25 Nov 68, Queen notified the Da Nang alert crews (JG 34 and 32) to standby at Jolly Green operations for a possible mission. The alert crews arrived at operations at 2305Z and were scrambled for a mission at 270/85/CH 77. JG 34 and 32 were airborne at 2315Z with Spad 11 and 12 as escort. Queen advised all SAR forces that Covey 227 and 265 had crashed in an O-2 and that Covey 267 had voice contact with one survivor (Covey 227). No contact had been made with Covey 265. Panama gave vectors and flight following service to the JG's enroute to the crash site. JG 32 joined JG 34 at FL 080 and proceeded enroute. At approximately 2345Z the position of Covey 227 was refined to 002/22/72 by Spad 11 who was orbiting the survivors position. JG's arrived at the crash site at 0010Z and held at FL080 to allow Spads to check out the area and get an exact position on the survivor. The weather enroute was 6000' undercast, 15+ visibility. Weather at the crash site was clear except for fog in valleys and low stratus around the scene of the survivor. The undercast condition terminated approximately eight miles east of the SAR scene. At 0017Z Spad 11 advised that the area looked good for a pickup attempt and JG 34 began a decent with Spad 11 leading into the survivors position. JG 32 (high bird) held at FL050 over the pickup point. Internal fuel had been maintained at 1000# in each main tank and $\frac{1}{2}$ mile out on final approach to the survivor, the tip tanks were jettisoned. JG 34 requested the survivor to light a smoke and immediately an orange smoke was visible about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile ahead at 12 o'clock. JG 34 hovered over the survivor while Spad 11 and 12 made dry passes on each side of the survivor's position. The pickup was completed at 0025Z with no problems. No ground fire was heard or observed throughout the mission. Radio discipline was excellent for all forces. After the pickup, JG 34 exited the area on a NE heading as recommended by Spad 11. Queen was advised that the survivor was aboard and in excellent condition. JG 34 climbed to FL090 and orbited for 20 minutes while Spad 11 and 12, Covey 267, Nail 34 and JG 32 looked over the area for the second crew member (Covey 265). Because of low fuel remaining, JG 34 requested Crown 1 to rendezvous for A/R if it was decided to remain on scene and attempt to locate the other crew member. Queen advised that JG 34 RTB to CH 77 and other JG's from CH 77 would be scrambled if additional forces were required. JG 34 departed the SAR scene at 0045Z for CH 77 escorted by Spad 03 and 04. At approximately 0045Z Spad 11 sighted a metal object on a ridge in the vicinity of the crash scene, however they were unable to positively identify the object. JG 32 was requested to make a low pass on the area and identify the object to see if it was the crashed O-2 and if the other crew member was in the aircraft (Covey 265). JG 32 made a minimum low pass over the area at 20KTS. The object was identified as parts of a drop tank. At 0055Z JG 32 departed the area, climbed to FL 080 and proceeded east toward CH 77. At 0105 Spad 11 sighted smoke rising from trees about 200 meters south of the survivors'

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42.

pickup point. This area had been obscured by low stratus earlier but was now clearly visible. Spad 11 believed this to be the O-2 wreckage and JG 32 made a low pass across the smoke area and positively identified the wreckage as the O-2 aircraft. Another approach was made to the wreckage and a hover was established to attempt visual sighting of the second O-2 crewmember. The O-2 was upside down and appeared to have made a soft vertical landing. (The survivor, Covey 227, had stated that the aircraft was in a flat spin when he bailed out.) The front engine was intact, cabin area completely burned out and no rear engine visible. The right tail boom was intact, left boom severely damaged with no rudder or horizontal stabilizer visible. JG 32 decided not to deploy his PJ to search the wreckage because it was still smoking and the aircraft had ordnance on board. It was determined that the second crewmember could not have survived the crash if he had remained in the cockpit because it had been completely burned out. JG 32 departed the area at 0130Z. JG 34 arrived CH 77 at 0140 with the one survivor (Covey 227). JG 32 arrived CH 77 at 0245Z.

(U) Crewmembers of Jolly Greens:

JOLLY GREEN 34 (Low)

Capt Gerald W. Moore	RCC
Capt Joseph J. Dillon	RCCP
Sgt Robert T. Anderson	FE
TSgt Nathaniel Smith Jr.	RS

JOLLY GREEN 32 (High)

Major Charles E. Wicker
LtCol Lamar G. Tullos
TSgt Charles D. Severns
Sgt Thomas T. Winters

(U) Spads were:

Spad 11

Major James B. Wheller

Spad 12

Major Neal Lucas

(U) Other aircraft assisting SAR effort: Crown 1, Covey 267, Nail 34, Spad 03, and Spad 04.

(U) Survivor's name: 1st Lt Allen S. Sheppard III,

GERALD W. MOORE, Captain, USAF
Rescue Crew Commander

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37 ARRSq, History, Oct - Dec 1968

6.

later that same date, and was effected over North Vietnam.

(10)(U) 1-3-114, 11 Nov 1968. Jolly Green 32 and 34 were scrambled from Quang Tri to recover the pilot of an A-4 that had gone down northwest of Quang Tri. (Ref. Supporting Document 10, page 37.)

(11)(U) 1-3-116, 20 Nov 1968. Jolly Green 07 and 34 were launched from Da Nang to search for the remains of an F-4 that had crashed the night before north of the base. Deteriorating weather resulted in negative results and the mission was later terminated. (Ref. Supporting Document 11, page 38.)

(12)(U) 1-3-117, 20 Nov 1968. This mission resulted in the successful recovery of two pilots who had ejected west of Da Nang. One of the most significant factors that contributed to the success of the mission was that the pilots stayed with their disabled aircraft long enough to put them in terrain where a safe recovery could be made. (Ref. Supporting Document 12, page 39.)

(13)(U) 1-3-120, 25 Nov 1968. Jolly Green 34 and 32 were scrambled from Da Nang to recover the pilots of an O-2 that had crashed earlier west of Da Nang. The mission results were that one pilot was recovered and the other apparently perished in the aircraft. (Ref. Supporting Document 13, page 41.)

(14)(U) 1-3-121, 30 Nov 1968. While returning from strip alert at Quang Tri, Jolly Green 31 heard a Mayday being transmitted by a Marine CH-46. Jolly Green 31 responded to the Mayday and landed beside the disabled ch-46 on a sand dune and successfully recovered all five crew members. (Ref. Supporting Document 14, page 43.)

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OTTCZYUW RUMOSRA1162 3321103-CCCC-RUCIEUA.

ZNY CCCCC

O P 270850Z NOV 68

FM OL2 3ARRGP UDORN RTAFB THAILAND

TO RHMTSNA/3ARRGP/JSARC/TSN AB RVN

RUEFHQA/CSAF/AFCP/AFXOPFH/WASHINGTON DC

RUCIEUA/MAC/MCP/MAOCCOA/SCOTT AFB ILL

RUCIEUA/ARSCP SCOTT AFB ILL

RUHHABA/PACARRC/PROCP/HICKAM AFB HAWAII

INFO RHMTSNA/7AF/DOTO/DO/DO/DI/BDPMP/CP/TSN AB RVN

RUMTFJA/USAFMPC/AFPMSC/RANDOLPH AFB TEXAS

RHMSMVA/MACV SAIGON RVN

RUHHABA/CINC PACAF/CC/HICKAM AFB HAWAII

RUKLAAA/TAC/DOOS-LR/LANGELY AFB VA

ZEN/TUOC UDORN RTAFB THAILAND

RUMHPD/OL-1 3ARRGP SON TRA RVN

RUCEAAA/HQ USAF ALTERNATE CP MAXWELL AFB ALA

RUMBPN/DET 1 40 ARRS NAKHON PHANOM RTAFB THAILAND

RUMBPN/602SOS NAKHON PHANOM RTAFB THAI

BT

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ JOPREP JIFFY RESCUE REPORT/OL-2, 3 ARRG

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1. RESCUE OPENING/CLOSING REPORT.

2. 2-3-071-8332

3. A. TACTICAL B. CLASSIFIED C. GRAY/57-2885/02/RAVEN30.

D. UNKNOWN E. UNKNOWN F. UNKNOWN G. 2 H. UNKNOWN.

4. OL-1, 3ARRGP/27/0338Z. 5. SE 6. 2/HH3E/DET-1, 40 ARRS;

4/A1H/602SOS; 1/HC130P/39ARRS AT 27/0340Z 7. JG 16/17 LAUNCHED AT

27/0432Z; SANDIES 1, 2 LAUNCHED AT 27/0436Z; SANDIES 3, 4 LAUNCHED

AT 27/0441Z; CROWN 1 DIVERTED TO AREA AT 27/0340Z. 8. 1618N 10543E.

9. A. NOT A FACTOR B. NOT A FACTOR. 10. OL-2, 3 ARRG CAPT

WILLIAM E. ARNOLD, TSGT RICHARD A. LINCK. 11. NONE 12. HOBO

41 27/0342Z/1618N 10543E. 13. DET-1, 40ARRS/HH3E/PJ DEPLOYED/27/

0615Z. 14. 2/2/2/0/0/2. 15. TAKEN TO NAKHOM PHANOM RTAFB THAILAND.

16. 2/5PLUS10/DET-1, 40ARRS/HH3E; 4/4PLUS50/602SOS/A1H; 2/2PLUS35/39

ARRS/HC130P. 17. 0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0. 18. A. RCC OLIVER, JAMES E. CAPT;

RCCP WEEDEN, DALE N. MAJOR; FE GALLAGHER, GREGORY G. SGT; PJ WIDNER,

DALFORD R.V. SGT. ALL ASSIGNED TO DET-1, 40 ARRS. B. UNKNOWN

19. H. NO ARRS COMBAT SAVES/NO AIR REFUELING ACCOMPLISHED/PJ WAS

DEPLOYED. NOTIFIED BY OL-1, 3 ARRG THAT RAVEN 30 WAS DOWN POSITION

1618N 10543E. HOBO 41 WAS ON SCENE AND REPORTED NO SIGN OF SURVIVORS

AND AIRCRAFT WAS IN RIVER. LAUNCHED JG 16/17 AND SANDIES 1,2,3,4

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FROM NAKHOM PHANOM RTAFB. JG 17 MADE PICKUP OF DECEASED CREW MEMBERS

AND TOOK THE BODIES TO NAKHOM PHANOM RTAFB THAILAND. GP-4

BT

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SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
AUTOMATICALLY DOWNGRADED AT TWO
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DECLASSIFIED ON 31 DEC 74

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27 Nov 68

RECEIVED 211
375 ABGP

27 Nov 68 15 22z

ACTION INFO

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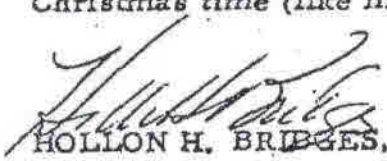
significant opportunity for real progress will occur after 1 January 1969 when all of our personnel records will have been dispersed to host base CBPO's. When that occurs our detachments and squadrons will be able to work with the CBFO's directly on data purification and this should shorten the time expended in validating what we have and correcting what MAC shows us to have. I will continue to press on in this area and stand ready to assist the staffs in getting some positive results.

13. My new conference room was completed and put to effective use this month. The first day it was functional I had the pleasure of briefing General Faught and his party of 12 in this new addition to our headquarters (built exclusively by self-help).

14. Save Summary for November 1968:

	Combat	Non-Combat	USAF C/NC	USN C/NC	USA C/NC	USMC C/NC	F/MIL C/NC	CIV C/NC
INN-3	13	2	6/0	0/0	0/0	7/2		
INN-43	19	18	4/3	3/0	3/5	0/0	9/5	0/5
INN-53	15	0	1/0	0/0	3/0	0/0	6/0	5/0
TOTAL	47	20	11/3	3/0	6/5	7/2	15/5	5/5

15. On behalf of the entire 3ARRGp we wish you and your staff a MERRY CHRISTMAS and A HAPPY NEW YEAR. As for us over here, we are thankful for a most wonderful and productive year and are hoping for a few blessings to be bestowed upon us around Christmas time (like maybe a few new people).


HOLLON H. BRIDGES, Colonel, USAF
Commander

cc: Pac ARRC

The Day We Lost the Hoss.

By Thomas E. (Tom) Lee
Version 1.0, November, 1998
© Thomas E. Lee 1998

This is the account of the loss of Forward Air Controller Edward "Hoss" McBride, call sign RAVEN 30, on November 27, 1968 in Savannakhet Province, Laos. It captures the drama as experienced by the players who were fighting the "Secret War" in Laos late in November of 1968. It varies significantly from the version of his death in Christopher Robbins' book, "The Ravens".¹ The Internet tribute to "Major McBride, The Singing FAC" on the Air Commando Association (ACA) Home Page profoundly influenced my finishing this paper as did the fact that the McBride children were searching for more information concerning their father and his activities in Laos.² I knew I could provide some of that information. Hoss McBride and I developed a close friendship during his five months at Savannakhet. We flew together, worked together and partied together. However, some of my most memorable memories of Hoss were the long talks he and I shared late at night. I took his loss very hard.

This article is an extract from my on-going personal memoir project concerning my experiences in the Secret War in Laos in 1968-1969 while serving as a Project 404 Intelligence Officer.³ One of my duties was to support the RAVEN Forward Air Controllers (FAC) in Military Region Three (MR3) in South Laos.⁴ The core of this account is my personal memories of that day at the AIRA Site in Savannakhet.⁵ Into these personal recollections, I have interwoven important details drawn from a variety of other sources.⁶ The dialogue is representative and may not be actually what was said. However, it captures the flavor of the exchanges that would have occurred. This story is not yet complete. Further documenting of the drama and the players continues and should enrich the details. But it will not change the basic facts presented here.

Regretfully, the article is not contextually complete. Were the complexities of the the political, military and organizational situation in Laos discussed, it would be at least twice the present length. Therefore, much of the big picture setting of the event has been sacrificed for brevity.⁷ The focus is on a single day's activities concerning a single person's mission in the operational war. None of the known details of the November 27, 1968 incident have been omitted. The footnotes are integral to the article and provide additional information for the reader's better understanding of the events. If the reader is unfamiliar with the Laotian aspect of the Vietnam War, a review of the glossary before reading the article may be useful. It will introduce a rather unique lexicon of terms, phrases and codes used during the war.

1. See "The Ravens." By Christopher Robbins, Crown Publishers, New York 1987. pp 81-82. It is a challenge to dispute the mythology surrounding the demise of a colorful character like Hoss McBride. As a chronicler, Chris Robbins recorded stories provided to him. In the case of the "Candy Bomber of Laos", many of the events recounted in the Robbins' book did occur but not at the same time, nor did they contribute to his untimely death. While flying with Hoss, I experienced a number of these events from the back seat "sunroom" of the O-1.

2. See <http://home.earthlink.net/~aircommando1/mcbride.html>. Until reading this tribute in August, 1998 I did not know what happened to Hoss after NKP. During my research, I learned that his remains were flown from NKP to Udorn by Air America. After a formal medical review, he was

shipped back to the States for burial. Hoss is buried in Hattisburg, Mississippi.

3. In mid -1966, the U.S. Department of Defense began Project 404, a covert augmentation of Deputy Chief Military Assistance Command, Thailand (DEPCHIEF) and the U.S. military attaches in Laos. Under the program about 120 USAF and USA personnel were administratively assigned to DEPCHIEF in Thailand but served in Laos. DEPCHIEF was the unclassified cover for Military Assistance Command, Laos.

4. In October, 1966 the U.S. began to station USAF Forward Air Controllers (FACs) in Laos using the call sign of RAVEN. RAVENs were volunteer FACs with previous Vietnam experience. They were in TDY status and administratively assigned to WATERPUMP (Det 1, 56 SOW) at Udorn.

5. The AIRA Site was a USAF-manned operational site at Savannakhet that supported the US Embassy target validation activities, the RAVEN FACs in MR3, and direct support to the RLAF T-28Ds, plus other sundry activities. The site had an extensive communications suite including a broad spectrum of radios (FM, HF, VHF, and UHF), secure voice and message capability, non secure microwave telephone to the US military network in Thailand as well as a Savannakhet-based "telephone company of about 50 subscribers". The communications suite operated around the clock, 7 days a week. The site had various call signs including TEXAS, CAPETOWN, and SMOKEY during 1968-1969. There were approximately 20 USAF personnel manning the site. They included the legal Assistant Air Attache, and the "black" (covert) personnel. All black personnel were "rankless civilians" referred to as Mister. There were approximately four officer "misters" (AOC Commander, 2 FACs and the Intelligence Officer). The remainder were enlisted "misters". Their skills included administration, communications, maintenance (air and ground), supply, flight line support, EOD and medical. All covert personnel wore civilian clothes as mandated by the U.S. Embassy. Our cover was exceptionally thin, and was not of the "sheep dipped" variety of people seconded to the CIA. Nevertheless we made it work. Occasionally, I used the CIA for cover when I met former Air Force friends in Thailand to hide our activities.

6. William Forsyth of Joint Task Force - Full Accounting (JTF-FA) at the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) provided invaluable logs to tell the SAR story as well as maps that allowed me to relocate the crash site. Charles Buckley, a former Det 1, 56 SOW medic at WATERPUMP, who flew with Hoss in Northern Laos, confirmed accounts concerning the crash effects. Captain Lee Gossett, the Continental Air Services Inc. (CASI) pilot that flew the Beech Baron over the crash site, recounted his memories of the event.

7. The sources in the bibliography provide corroborative information and are useful reading for a broader context of Laotian events.

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November 27, 1968 Savannakhet Laos

The day began like many others. Hoss McBride is up early as usual. He fires up a fresh cigar and heads for the bathroom. I awake to the smell of cigar smoke. How can he smoke one of those things so early in the morning? Hoss clumps down the hall and descends the stairs to the first floor. Jungle boots make such a sweet sound on wooden floors. That is my signal to get up and dress. I am still tired from the Air America crash earlier in the week.⁸ The target validation fiasco with MOONBEAM last night didn't help either. Maybe it was a new guy on the ABCCC who sent just a coordinate for validation.⁹ Normally the night guys are real good; it could have been a bad night for them too. I visit the bathroom for a quick shave and follow McBride down to breakfast. Mr Hai, our venerable Vietnamese cook, brings in the coffee pot so we can jump start our hearts.¹⁰ He takes our orders for eggs - a stirring motion means scrambled, a flip of the hand means fried over easy. Those were the breakfast egg choices at the Green House diner, take um or leave um.¹¹

We hold our breakfast operations planning meeting. Discussions center on what is going on in the southern part of MR III. We are uncomfortable about not knowing what the bad guys are doing. Our concern is that they might get organized and mount a counter action to the Fa Ngum. One offensive last August when Muang Phalane was retaken by a joint SGU/FAR operation. Another possibility is a move west along the Sé Bang Hiang (River) to the Keng Kok region, or even to the Mekong, cutting the country apart near the MR3 and MR4 boundary. We do not know.

With breakfast complete we go our separate ways. The FACs go to the base, and I drive to the morning meeting at MR3 headquarters.¹³ Concern at the morning meeting also centers on activities in the south. Both the FAR and CAS sources seem to agree that something strange is occurring. It concerns a multi-unit troop activity near the Sé Bang Hiang.¹⁴ Coordinates are passed. No change from yesterday. The meeting adjourns. Thankfully short for a change. Bureaucrats worldwide are the same. They can take a 30 minute meeting and cram it into hours.

Hoss will take the morning flight with a Lao observer. FAC preflight preparation is relaxed; nothing like the formal USAF briefings of our brethren across the river. There is no intelligence prebrief since the intelligence is the information from the MR3 meeting. The AIRA site did not try to maintain an enemy ground order of battle due to the tenuous stream of intelligence and our one deep level of manning. In 1968, there were no known anti-aircraft defenses in this area so there was no threat brief. Ground fire was always a possibility and everyone knew that. Radio frequencies of the air and ground contacts were already in the check list. This will be a visual reconnaissance (VR) flight with the possibility of action depending upon what is found in the target area - a typical FAC flight in MR3 at this time.

Hoss gathers up his flight gear from the Intel Shop's storage area behind the map stands. He takes his survival vest, map case, flak jacket, binoculars, AR-15, and .38 caliber sidearm.¹⁵ The RAVENs in Savannakhet do not wear flying helmets nor did they have them. For the most part they do not wear long sleeved flying clothes like their USAF compadres. Most wear flying gloves. On his way out of the building Hoss stops to fill his canteen with fresh water from the water cooler. Usually he leaves his signature straw hat at the site for safekeeping or in his jeep which is brought back to the site from the flight line. Today, it is the site. He leaves the hat on my target validation map table just to jerk my chain because he knows that I will have to move it to use the maps underneath. This is one of the comic relief gotcha games we play.

Hoss picks up his Lao observer from the new AOC building before he goes to the flight line. Preflight of an O-1 is not exceptionally complicated; A walk around of the bird, a check of the armament (Willy Pete rockets), check the flight control surfaces, a fuel and oil check. Everything looks OK.16

Load up the aircraft. Lao observer and AR-15 in back plus other gear. Map case and binoculars in front. Put on the flak vest, climb in and readjust the front seat to the big boy position. Hoss is the biggest man flying these airplanes at L39. All Clear. Crank the engine. The little Continental engine coughs and then roars to life. Systems stabilize and instruments look good. Contact SMOKEY Control for radio checks - victor, uniform and fox mike. Radio checks acknowledged. Ground crew removes the safety pins on the rockets. The wheel chocks are pulled. Time to go.

Throttle applied, the engine responds and the Birddog begins to move. A 180 degree turn toward the taxiway. Dust billows across the PSP as the little bird taxis. Onto the the asphalt surface of the taxiway. The dust stops. Side windows are open to get a little cool air in the aircraft. Stop at the runway. Call the tower. What a joke! If the tower is manned, and if its radio works, it serves only as a lookout for landing aircraft. But it is an attempt at air traffic control. Little things are important in Laos. Visual check the approaches to insure there is not incoming traffic, regardless what you are told by the tower. This is do it yourself Air Traffic Control. Taxi onto the runway. Heading 220. Run up, release brakes and go. Call airborne to SMOKEY, bank left over the Air America ramp and then head southeast following Route 11 toward Keng Kok. Soon after getting airborne, the ever present cigar is lit. Ah! The flight departs L39 about 0845 (0145Z). This allows for a three hour operational flight and recovery by Noon. That schedule permits a minimum maintenance turnaround if that aircraft is needed in the afternoon. The flight from L39 to the target area takes about 45 to 60 minutes given Hoss is observing the road and activity along the way. He is over the search area by about 0945 local (0245Z). The cigar goes out and the work begins.

8. An Air America C-46 serving as the USAID courier crashed at Savannakhet on Monday afternoon killing all 34 people aboard. (The newspaper article in the bibliography was in error.) Hoss and I went to the crash site together. He organized the recovery effort. We pulled bodies from the wreck Monday evening till dark. We were "extracted" from a makeshift LZ near the crash site aboard Captain Ed Reid's Air America Bell 205. The stress level and emotional trauma was already high in Savannakhet before this accident, due to the loss of another associate, CAS case officer, Wayne McNulty in August 1968. The small American community in Savannakhet was a closely knit group. This accident drove the stress level to the near limits. But it was to go higher.

9. I was the US Embassy target validation officer in South Laos (usually my night job). The night airborne command and control aircraft (MOONBEAM) was providing incomplete information while trying to get target validations approved.

10. Hoss received care packages of 100% Colombian coffee from his wife who was from Colombia. The 100% Colombian coffee really got us going in the morning.

11. The Green House was the name for the "officers" quarters in Savannakhet. But since we were all misters I guess I can't say that. The "Grey House" was the quarters for the enlisted misters. The dwellings were named for their exterior colors.

12. The village of Muong Phalane is along Route 9, approximately 50 nautical miles east of L39, about two thirds the distance from L39 to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Since 1965 it had formed the de facto eastern boundary of FAR influence and the western boundary of PAVN influence. The installation of a USAF TACAN site in March, 1968 upset this stalemate since it was used to attack the infiltration routes. The town was attacked by PAVN battalion and a Dac Cong (special task)

company late on December 24, 1967. They destroyed the USAF TACAN station located at the nearby LS61, an Air America radio station and USAID facilities. See Van Staaveren, CAP 671165, and Conboy. Two Americans, four Thai and 21 Lao Army were killed. BI 28, the FAR unit guarding the town fled. This was the first significant enemy action in a year in this part of the Panhandle. The town was retained in December and subsequently lost in February, 1968. In August 1968, the First Special Guerrilla Unit (SGU) Battalion supported by the Royal Lao Army (FAR) retook the village with significant assistance from the RAVENs, the Lao T-28s and . This meeting was an attempt at joint coordination. The participants usually included the MR3 Chief of Staff, Col. Thao Ly, his staff, the Assistant Air Attache, the Project 404 Army representative, the Controlled American Source (CAS) representative, and AIRA Intelligence. USAF/USN air strikes. Hoss was a major player in this first offensive success in MR3 in a year.

13. This meeting was an attempt at joint coordination. The participants usually included the MR3 Chief of Staff, Col. Thao Ly, his staff, the Assistant Air Attache, the Project 404 Army representative, the Controlled American Source (CAS) representative, and AIRA Intelligence.

14. Sé is river in Laotian.

15. We were provided the latest in small arms. Ha! We carried the civilian Armalite, the AR-15, rather than the military M-16. Remember we were civilians! The .38 caliber revolvers the FACs carried during missions were worn out USAF sidearms. We joked that the RAVENs had the last of the "smooth bore" pistols in the USAF inventory. Often we borrowed better weapons from the CIA, or carried liberated Chinese AK-47s. I carried a new .38 caliber revolver all the time, but that is another story.

16. Willy Pete is White Phosphorus. It creates a white marking smoke for the fighters to see and use as a reference while bombing.

17. L39 was the code for the Savannakhet airfield. See "Air Facilities Data, Laos"; Flight Information Center; Vientiane; May 1970.

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The Recovery, November 27, 1968

While we were returning to L39 the SAR was progressing. At 1200 (0500Z) SANDY 1 reported he had contact with friendlies in the area. Two minutes later SHAKO and TOMCAT flights were diverted to LION (Ubon CRC) for the SAR if they were needed. SANDY 1 was in contact with ground party CV393 and will have them check out the crash site. At 1217 (0517Z) a log entry indicated "Ground Team Good" and no ground fire. At 1218 (0518Z) it was reported that a Porter aircraft has good contact with the ground team and CROWN. However, it would take hours for the team to get to the area. At 1220 (0520Z) it was logged that there were 2 USAF aboard RAVEN 30. The information source was unspecified, but this would have been the worst case. SMOKEY did not provide the information so it may have been AIRA Vientiane. At 1240 (0540Z) aircraft PCL (the Porter?) advises that a ground party is 5 to 6 kilometers away and there are no hostiles in the area. If McBride did put in an airstrike in the vicinity of the crash site, this report is suspect. A logged description of the area at 1245 (0545Z) said "Terrain flat. River about 5 feet. Bank on each side approximately 15 feet with heavy fern growth on each side. Aircraft is partially submerged. Part of canopy is above water." By this time the JOLLY GREENs were holding west of the site and the SANDYs were checking out the area. At 1302 (0602Z) JOLLY GREEN 17 moves in and advises that he doesn't think there are any survivors. Minutes later he reports he has one body in sight and will try for pick up of deceased. By 1308 (0608Z) the PJ was on the way down. This recovery is not without risks. The recovery helicopter has to hover over the wreckage while the PJs extract the crew from the wrecked aircraft in the river. The PJs then have to negotiate each of the deceased crew members in turn into a Stokes basket lowered for that purpose. The basket is then winched up to the helicopter for each deceased crew member. During this time the recovery helicopter and its crew is very vulnerable to ground fire. At 1315 (0615Z) both of the deceased crew were picked up and the JOLLY GREEN was returning to Channel 89 (NKP) with an ETA of 1410 (0710Z).

Back at the AIRA site, discussions center on the O-1 wreckage. The decision is made to bomb the aircraft to deny the use of the radios by the enemy. However, it is getting too late in the day to make that happen before dark.

Jack Strobel, the AAIRA, told me that I was going to NKP to identify Hoss and recover the remains of the observer. The afternoon was waning and to get on it. I drove back to Air Ops where a Porter was waiting to take us north. We had an escort of four Laotian military to accompany us. I climbed in the right seat of the Porter with the little guys in back. It was an ordinary workhorse Porter - grey in color without insignia, used to move people and supplies throughout the country.

The Filipino pilot introduced himself, gave a two minute introduction to the aircraft, and off we went. He did the super short takeoff for my benefit. In a Porter it is impressive. He runs the turboprop up to full power, gets the tail up and then cuts in the variable pitch prop at which time the Porter begins a take off roll and virtually jumps into the air. After what had just happened, this was the thrill for the day. For the hour's flight to NKP we talked about the Philippines after I told him I grew up there. This was good for me because it got my mind on something else.

When we landed at NKP we taxied up to the ramp near the tower. We were met by a NAIL FAC, a mutual friend of Hoss and myself. He said that he had already identified Hoss and said I did not have to do that chore. I was thankful. He briefed me on the findings and gave me a bag with Hoss's personal effects in it. His billfold was still wet from the river. There were tears in both of our eyes as we talked. An ambulance brought the remains of the observer to the aircraft. The escorts carefully lifted the body bag into the Porter and laid it out on the floor of the aircraft. This Porter like many

had a parachute drop trap door in the floor of its cargo bay. We had to avoid laying the body over the trap door should it come open unexpectedly from the weight. Your mind operates in strange and tragic-comic ways during times of stress. The fast forward of my thoughts played out a situation where we lost the observer through the trap door on the return trip and we had to explain the loss of our deceased passenger when we returned to L39. Coming back to reality, I thanked the FAC for his efforts, particularly in the identification, and shook his hand; our eyes met and we embraced, tears streaming down onto the shoulders of the other - a combat brotherhood in mourning. I bid him farewell not knowing this was the last time I would see him. I walked back to the Porter, climbed in, maneuvering around the fallen comrade on the floor. I looked at our Lao escorts and said in my very best Lao "sia chay lay lay" (many many sorries). Their faces acknowledged and told their feelings. Nationality, service, rank or manliness didn't count. We were grieving for our friends. The scream of the Porter's turboprop crossed the ramp. Young Americans in t-shirts and cammie pants who had watched the unfolding scene, turned away and returned to work. The NAIL waved or maybe he saluted our departure. He felt the loss because he had worked with the Lao observers at NKP. As we taxied out I stared at the HOBOS and the NIMRODs dressed for war, the O-2s and the Helios parked along the NKP ramps. I thought, what the hell is this all about? And what does it all mean? Minutes later we were in the air heading south.

It was a somber flight down the Mekong. Evening was coming on and the shadows were getting long across the majestic mile wide river. We crossed the fence and landed to the south. When we taxied up to Air Ops at L39, there was a Lao military honor guard waiting with a number of the MR3 and air community present, Lao and American. The escorts smartly removed the body from the Porter and a brief ceremony began on the ramp. I thanked the pilot, climbed out of the Porter, and slipped away to my jeep.

I drove to the site. There on my desk was a message from Gus Sonnenberg, Assistant Air Attache at the Embassy in Vientiane. I had been appointed Summary Court Officer for Major E. E. McBride. Even in death, the paperwork must be done. Hoss was no longer a mister. He had passed back through the veil of secrecy back into the Air force. Today there had been bad very bad pi.

Twenty three days after the incident, a highly classified intelligence collector visited the area. Mission 1049, a United States KH4A photo reconnaissance satellite, silently crossed the Savannakhet Plain from north to south at an altitude of approximately 100 miles. The weather was perfect over the crash site. On Pass 119, its 24 inch focal length, aft panoramic camera captured the scene on frame 241. The people on the ground were unaware of its existence or its visit. Similarly, the CIA photo interpreters at the Washington Navy Yard and the DIA photo interpreters at Arlington Hall Station, Virginia who later reviewed this frame of photography, were equally unaware of the tragedy that occurred three weeks earlier along the Sé Bang Hiang which is clearly visible on the photo. How far apart in viewpoint was the bean counting world of Washington and the battlefield in Laos.

Epilogue, The Pentagon, Fall 1969

When I left Laos in 1969, I was reassigned to the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff Intelligence, Headquarters USAF (AFIN) at the Pentagon. As with all new guys you did your time in the hole. The proper name for this uninspiring job was the AFIN Liaison Officer to the Defense Intelligence Agency's National Military Intelligence Center (NMIC). It was a night and weekend job in the bowels of the Pentagon being a message sorter and reviewer for the day empire of analysts and briefers. You were at the absolute bottom of the food chain, even below a watch officer. Talk about a real downer after Laos where you were really doing something worthwhile. The only good news was

that you could review, and read if you desired, messages of all classifications, on all subjects, worldwide. I devoured the Laos message traffic.

Early one morning, as the coffee jug was running dry and the eyes were very heavy, I began to read even another message concerning Laos. As with many of the Pathet Lao/PAVN messages, it was full of patriotic rhetoric. This message was an admonition to be more security conscious and be alert to American aircraft. It cited a year old incident as the example. The next few sentences spoke of a FAC putting in air strikes, fighters bombing the patriotic forces, the patriotic forces shooting at the FAC airplane and its crash in the river. I was stunned. This was the McBride incident told from the other side. I read further. The strikes disrupted the re-equipping of regional Pathet Lao/PAVN forces. The units had gathered to turn in their older weapons and were being issued the newer AK-47s when the air strikes occurred. The message concluded that obviously the Americans knew this was happening due to a breach of security and attacked at the most inopportune time. Therefore be more vigilant. End of message.

The country boy unknowingly waded into a bee hive of bad guys itching to try out their new toys. HOB0 41 was right. There probably was alot of ground fire that day. How ironic! What happened a year earlier was answered by the enemy themselves and I happened to be on duty that night to read that particular message. Hoss passed into Valhalla doing what he loved to do - flying airplanes and getting the bad guys. However, I am convinced that his last moments concerned not the war or himself but the guy in back - his observer. That was the kind of person he was.

24. CV393 was a "Compagnie Volunteer" (Volunteer Company). It was a company sized MR3 paramilitary unit. Apparently the presence of the Porter in the area checking on the team was coincidental. However, this team may have been the source of the intelligence concerning the PL/PAVN units in the area.

25. This summary was gleaned from discussions with PJs who did such recoveries.

26. From 38ARRS log for November 27, 1968.

27. There is continuing confusion about the NAIL's identity. For years, I associated the call sign of NAIL 20 with this incident. My memorabilia did not record his name nor did my brain despite his visiting Savannakhet on a special invite. (USAF military personnel normally did not visit Laos on "social calls" without Embassy approval.) Early in 1969 the NKP 56 SOW TUOC intel folks told me of the loss of this FAC. The call sign NAIL 20 does not match the current USPACOM JTF-FA records of actual KIA/MIA from the 23TASS during this period. It may have been NAIL 40, Captain Robert Rex, who was KIA on 9 March 1969 at XD574628 while supporting a Special Forces team insertion. This is a detail that remains to be resolved.

28. In February, 1995, the first generation of U.S. space-based national intelligence reconnaissance imagery, including the KH4A, was declassified by Executive Order 12951. I have a copy of frame 241 and am reviewing it for additional insights.

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From: Chuck McGrath <cmcgrat@exis.net>

Subject: Request for info - Raven 30, 27 Nov 1968

This msg was relayed by Chuck Rouhier, webmaster of the Jolly Green website. Requestor is Tom Lee tlee@erols.com

v/r

Chuck McGrath

-----Original Message-----

From: Tom Lee [mailto:tlee@erols.com]

Sent: Friday, September 25, 1998 5:22 PM

To: rouhierc@deskbook.osd.mil

Subject: Jolly Green 17

I'm looking for the crew of Jolly Green 17 (or 16) who recovered the remains of Raven 30 (Hoss McBride - the Singing FAC) and his Lao observer on Nov 27, 1968 from an O-1 in the Xe Bang Hiang (river) at approx WD773029 in Savannakhet Province, Laos, approx 15 NM west of Delta Point 47 (Catcher's Mitt). Picked up two KIA at about 1315 local and RTB Channel 89. I am writing the story of McBride's loss for his family, the Air Commando Assn., and posterity. I was the in country intel officer for the RAVENS at Savannakhet at that time. Was over the crash site before the rescue team came in. We saw the JGs and Sandys coming as we went bingo fuel. Need the perspective of the JG crew and the PJ if possible. The story as written is available to refresh fading 30 year old memories. Please help guys. Thanks and God bless.