

Det 12, 38 ARRS Unit History January - March 1969

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CHAPTER V

OPERATIONS

1. MISSIONS:

A. Mission Narratives:

21 JAN 69

(1) Mission Number 12-38-001-2169. Nha Trang tower notified Detachment 12 at 1729L that a man was bleeding to death two miles SE of Nha Trang AB. No further information was available at that time. Tower said that a forest penetrator would be required and further information would be available from a FAC flying over the injured man, and requested that the alert aircraft scramble immediately. Pedro 20 scrambled at 1733L with crewmembers Captain Daniel A. Nicholson RCC; Major Robert J. Kazmerchak RCCP; Sgt Joseph R. Capper RS (Airborne Firefighter) and A1C Timothy M. Reynolds RS (Pararescue Specialist). Enroute contact was made with the FAC who was orbiting the site. He vectored Pedro 20 to the site and informed the aircraft that the area was hostile. The crew then donned flak vests. Pedro 20 was advised to orbit until the arrival of supporting gunships and did so. Three UH-1D gunships arrived at 1745L. They visually located the ground party by smoke signal and pen gun flares and began sanitizing the area. At 1758L the gunships notified Pedro 20 that the area was ready for the pickup. As Pedro 20 descended to the pickup site the gunships continued their suppressive fire on the area. Sgt Capper and A1C Reynolds later reported that enemy tracer fire was going in all directions. The helicopter was brought to a hover 10 feet above the top of the two canopy jungle directly over the yellow smoke signal from the ground party.

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Sgt Capper who was sitting in the rear of the cabin sighted the team 150 feet to the rear. The aircraft hovered backward, climbing to avoid trees higher up the ridge. Upon reaching the overhead position over the injured man, A1C Reynolds lowered the forest penetrator through a ten foot hole in the tree canopy. The eighty foot trees formed a double canopy jungle. The injured man and the other five members of a Recon team were pinned down by enemy and suppressive fire. During the hover which lasted ten minutes, the intensity of both the ground fire and the suppressive fire increased greatly. Approximately five minutes was required to fasten the injured man to the forest penetrator. During the hover the helicopter began receiving ground fire. Sgt Capper began returning fire with his M-16 rifle. As the injured man was raised to the lower tree canopy, he became entangled in the tree branches. A1C Reynolds, who was exposed in the doorway of the helicopter, was required to raise and lower the hoist several times and manually manipulate the cable to free the injured Marine dangling 50 feet below. Once freed, he was raised to the cabin door and brought inside. At this time a bullet entered the pilot's door, passing through the cockpit ceiling behind the pilot and rupturing the engine oil cooler. Hot engine oil began spewing out of the top rear of the cockpit covering both pilots, the entire cockpit, and nose bubble with oil. Torque pressure and engine oil pressure immediately went to zero and the "engine oil low" and "master caution lights" illuminated. The co-pilot monitored the instruments, quickly assessed the damage while the pilot maintained a steady hover on the swaying tree tops. The PJ secured the survivor and advised the

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pilot that it was clear to take off. At that time a bullet hit the communication junction box, knocking out the hoist operator's interphone. In accordance with our pre-pickup briefing Pedro 20 was facing the mouth of the canyon, applied power and gained forward speed, while maintaining level flight. A gunship still administering suppressive fire was approaching Pedro 20 head-on. As it veered to the left, Pedro 20 accelerated while making a descent down the canyon. The PJ and RS began to untie the survivor who had been attached to the forest penetrator by two straps and tied on with a rope harness similar to that used in the McGuire recovery. These additional tie-downs were unnecessary and only delayed the recovery and departure of the rescue helicopter. Pedro 20 maintained approximately 500 feet above the terrain while flying approximately one and a half miles to the mouth of the canyon and turning into the next valley toward Nha Trang. Both pilots were looking for the first clear area to land in, however the entire valley was covered with dense foliage. Five miles from the recovery site a precautionary power-on landing was completed in a clearing approximately 200 feet in diameter, and the engine shutdown. The rotor brake, which was later found to be damaged by ground fire, was inoperative. The survivor had been placed on a litter and was evacuated from the aircraft. He was transferred to an escorting Army UH-1 helicopter for transportation to the hospital at Nha Trang. One combat save was recorded.