

Feburary 18th and 19th (1969)

This account of a rescue mission was written by LTC Rolland Speckman, USAF (Ret), with info and documentation by LTC Whitney (ret) and SMSGT Lapoint (ret). None of these three individuals where there.

Ive tried to clarify exactly what happened on the ground during this mission for I was the only PJ there. The air crews may have seen something different and would have there own version of what happened.

The time that I spoke (in private) with Mike Dodd and Rick Petroski is the only time iv'e given a mostly full account of my memory of what happened.

Please take these 49 year old memories for what they are (OLD).

Michael E. Fish

PJ 66-76

HEROES

The following story was inspired from an article in the SEARCHER Newsletter of the
41st ARRW and submitted by
LtC Roland Speckman, USAF (ret)

AF CROSS Goes to PARARESCUEMAN



TAN SON NHUT AB, Vietnam - Heroic efforts to rescue an Army patrol and downed helicopter crew earned SGT Michael E. Fish the Nation's second highest award for bravery. Sgt Fish was presented the Air Force Cross by Secretary of the Air Force, Robert C. Seamans Jr. during the Secretary's visit here. Cited for voluntarily risking his life for more than 15 hours, Sergeant Fish saved an Army UH-1 helicopter pilot and also helped rescue others while pinned down by deadly enemy fire.

The helicopter was shot down Feb 18, 1969, while attempting to rescue a small **LRP** patrol from an area in close proximity to a North Vietnamese Army stronghold in a canyon 28 miles west of Tuy Hoa AB. (2)

When the **U.S. Army** asked for help, a HH-43 from **DET11 38ARRS** answered the call. Flying to the hostile area, **PEDRO 05** was accompanied by Huey Gunships.

Despite several strafing runs by the Gunships, heavy enemy fire was directed at the HH-43 as it made its approach to the crash scene. The rescue attempt would have normally been delayed until enemy fire was suppressed, but the condition of several of the survivors was described as "grave" and the unarmed **PEDRO** continued in for the rescue.

Hovering a few feet above the thick jungle canopy, (**PJ**) SGT Fish and (**ABR**) Airborne Rescue Specialist/Firefighter SSGT Reeves were lowered to the ground on a "Forest Penetrator". Once on the ground, ^{1A} despite continuing enemy ground fire, ¹ three injured crewmembers were given emergency medical care and lifted to the hovering Husky.

The loaded HH-43 departed for a clearing 5 miles from the mountains where the survivors were transferred to a UH-1 for a flight to the U.S. Army Evacuation Hospital at Phu Hiep. Dust-Off 83 (5) equipped with a hoist moved in and lifted out a LRP Team member, one KIA and departed low on fuel.

(3)

Sergeant Fish now, turned his attention and efforts to the seriously injured helicopter Copilot pinned in the tangled wreckage. Overhead, the Gunships were Winchester and departed the area to rearm and refuel. Working quietly so not to draw the enemy's attention, SGT Fish administered a sedative and continued his attempts to free the trapped Copilot. He was hampered by a malfunctioning K12 metal cutting saw and a Crash Hatchet that was ineffective against the twisted wreckage.

PEDRO05 returned to hover overhead, but was soon forced to depart the area BINGO on fuel recovering at Tuy Hoa AB at 18:55L. **PEDRO24** the replacement aircraft had been down for maintenance, but launched at 18:10L. They were vectored to the crash site by Tuy Hoa Approach Control.

Arriving on-scene, radio contact was established with an Army Gunship that pointed out the exact location as the wreckage was hard to see due to the terrain and foliage. Because of the high gross weight of the helicopter and the high density altitude, **PEDRO24** was required to use almost full power to hover above the trees. By taking advantage of wind and lowering the helicopter into a small opening in the trees, enough power was available to lift out one man, the **ABR** SGT Reeves who had initially deployed with SGT Fish.

During the pick-up, another flight of Huey Gunships arriving on-scene observed and attacked four enemy soldiers in a clearing just 200 yards from the crashed helicopter. (4)

PEDRO24 experienced a loss of radio communications. During this time the RESCAP Gunships departed the area to rearm and refuel leaving the Husky without cover. Departing the crash scene, **TWO-Four** arrived back at Tuy Hoa at 19:35L. (1748)

PEDRO05 refueled, launched at 19:00L passing **two-four** enroute. On-scene, the HH-43 orbited at 7500 MSL awaiting the arrival of a UH-1 Flare Ship and RESCAP Gunships. Extreme darkness and deteriorating weather necessitated IFR flight. Rendezvous with the Hueys was unsuccessful and **PEDRO05** returned to Tuy Hoa AB, landing at 20:05L.

Throughout the night the young **PJ** continued providing aid to the trapped Copilot. With the help of the four remaining **LRPs**, attempts to free the pilot's leg continued. These efforts had to be halted when cries from the survivor threatened to give away their

position to the enemy. SGt Fish administered morphine to ease the pain and quiet the man.

Surrounding the aircraft and providing security for their "Brother in Arms", the small team listened to the enemy moving in a streambed 30 yards downhill from the crash site. They fully anticipated being over run during the night. (8A)

PEDRO05 and **24** launched at 06:20L on 19 Feb 1969. Arriving on-scene, they were forced to orbit for 30 minutes awaiting the arrival of the RESCAP Gunships. **Crown 07** an **HC-130** was the On-Scene Commander and coordinated operations through the **JSARC (Joint Search and Rescue Center)** at Tan Son Nhut AB. Because of the delay, **PEDRO24** was cleared back to Tuy Hoa to refuel, thus allowing them to provide overlapping Rescue coverage.

(9)
With the arrival of the Gunships, **PEDRO05** was cleared into a hover over the crash scene. (ABR) SSGt McAllistar and (FE) TSGt Margaglino were lowered to the ground, followed by the crash entry equipment. **Zero-five** now climbed to 4000 feet to loiter and save fuel while the pilot was freed. Within 20 minutes the Husky was back overhead lifting out the injured pilot, a **LRP**, SSGt McAllistar and TSGt Margaglino. During the operation heavy enemy ground fire was answered with "pay back" from the minigun equipped Huey Gunships. Short on fuel, **PEDRO05** flew back to Tuy Hoa turning the injured pilot over to the **31st USAF Dispensary**. (10) (9)

After the departure of **PEDRO05**, **MARDI GRAS 138**, a hoist equipped **ARMY UH-1**, started recovering personnel as **PEDRO24** had not yet returned. Unfortunately, during the operation, one of the remaining **LRPs** slipped from the hoist and fell to his death. His body was recovered and along with the remaining personnel transported to the **91st Army Hospital** at Phu Hiep.

PEDRO05 Crew
18 Feb 1969

1. I was the only PJ on the ground during this entire mission. *I initially treated 3 critically injured and sent them one by one up to Pedro 05.
- 1A. LRP team in perimeter firefight with the enemy during most of the first day.
2. Fast movers were ruled out because of the small steep canyon we were in.
3. The way I remember it, I asked for the k-12 saw and Sgt. Reeves after I had the three critical out of the way. The co-pilot of the Huey was trapped in the wreckage but not in critical condition at that time.
4. * Still in FireFight
5. Dust off 83 removed 1 injured and 1 KIA
- 5A. I sent Sgt Reeves up to Pedro 24
6. Still in FireFight , gunships killed 4 NVA's
- 7 & 8. Some time before dark they wanted to exfil me out by hoist. I still had wounded and a trapped co-pilot. I stayed. (8 A.) Mostly quiet during the night except for movement around our perimeter.
9. We sure needed gunships, they came in with Pedro 05
10. In the morning FE and a FF came down with equipment and we were able to extract the co-pilot within 5 minutes. The FF and the FE were hoisted up with the injured co-pilot to Pedro 05.
11. Now there were just four of us on the ground.
12. As Pedro 05 left, a hoist equip Huey (Mardi Gras 138) came in and took myself, 2 LRP personnel and 1 KIA out of harms way back to Phu Hiep Army base.
13. Thank God for GunShips.

Mission - 1

(RCC) Capt Daniel A. Nicholson

(RCCP) Capt Charles T. Wohlneck

(ABR) SSGt Norman F. Reeves

E. Evans

(PJ) SGt Richard E. Evans

(PJ) SGt Michael E. Fish

Mission - 2

(RCC) Capt Daniel A. Nicholson

(RCCP) Capt Charles T. Wohlneck

(PJ) Richard

PEDRO24 Crew

(RCC) Capt Henry P. Fogg

(RCCP) Maj Edgar R. Whitney

(FE) SSGt Leroy W. King

(ABR) SSGt Robert A. McAllister

PEDRO05 Crew**19 Feb 1969**Mission - 1

Capt Daniel A. Nicholson

Maj. Edgar R. Whitney

SSGt Leroy W. King

Mission - 2

(RCC) Capt Daniel A. Nicholson

(RCC)

(RCCP) Maj. Edgar R. Whitney

(RCCP)

(FE) TSGt Thomas B. Margagliano

(FE)

(FE) SSGt Leroy W. King

(ABR) SSGt Robert A. McAllister

PEDRO24 CrewMission - 1&2

(RCC) Capt William F. Austin

(RCCP) Maj Morgan A. Downing

(FE) SSGt Raphael C. Martin

(PJ) SGt Richard E. Evans

EDITORS Note: Additional mission information and documentation supplied by
LtC Edgar R. Whitney (ret) and SMSGt Robert L. Lapointe (ret).