

6Oct69 Knife down SAR

"THE TRAP"

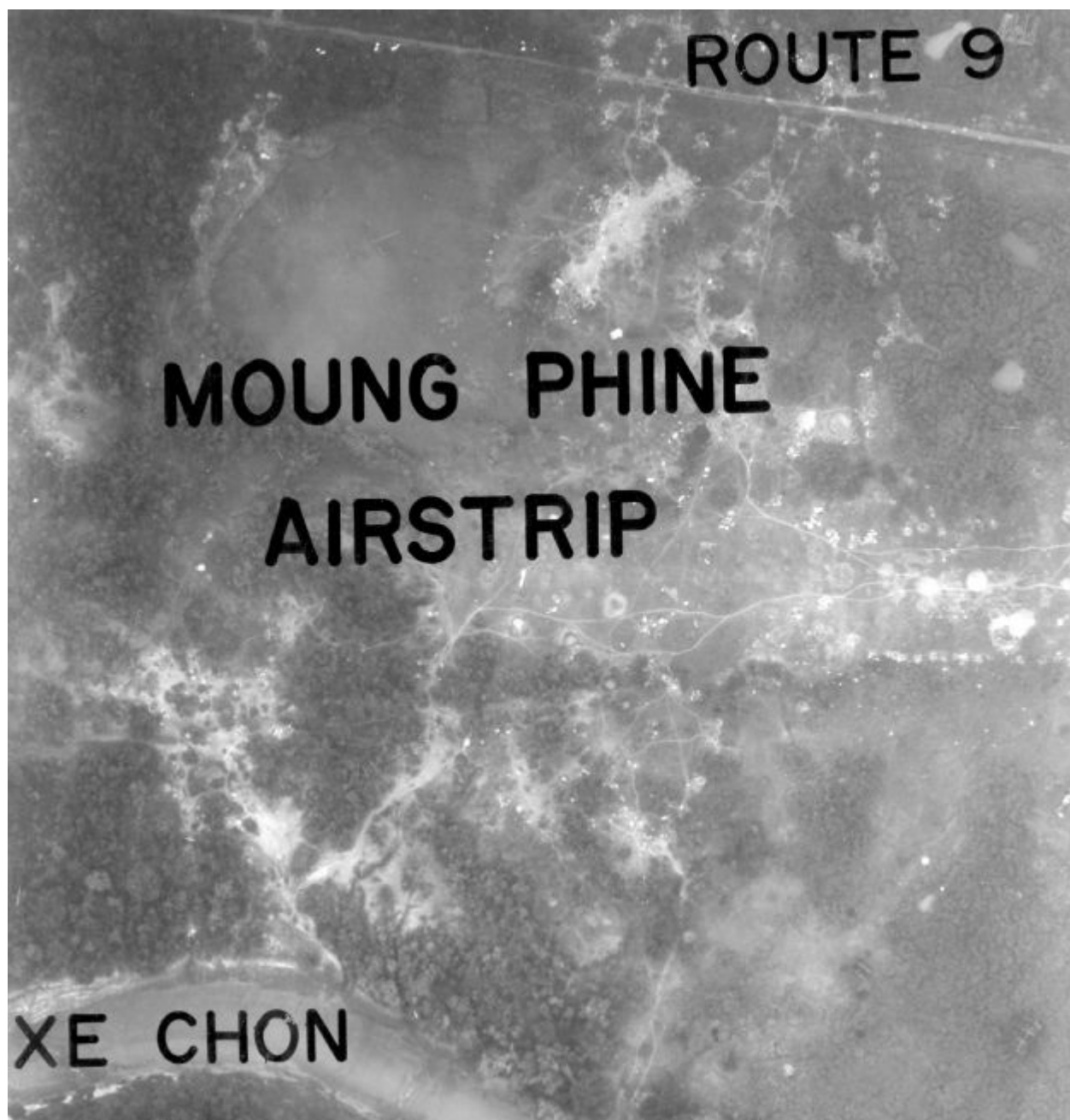
This is an attempt to document available information on this mission relating to the downing of two 21st SOS CH-3Es and the subsequent rescue of the crews. Considering the amount of time that has passed one may find some of the information is in contradiction. We have used the words of the individual(s) who provided their memories of that unfortunate day.

This was one of the 7th/13th AF/DOSA missions that the 21st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) flew in support of the CIA efforts in the Laotian panhandle. On 6 October 1969 the 21st SOS and the 20th SOS at Udorn were called upon for a massive infiltration of Hmong troops into an area which was near the village of Muang Phine Laos.

In support of Operation Junction City Junior, inserting SGU Battalion Red, two helicopters of the 21st were shot down. The aircraft were CH-3E 64-14222 (Knife 61) and CH-3E 62-12579 (Knife 62).

(Info from Tom Lee/ TLCB)





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What followed was the rescue of 8 USAF and 46
Indigenous personnel resulting in the largest

successful rescue effort of the war in SEA. An estimated 400 to 600 enemy forces were incapacitated during the rescue operations that day.

The crewmembers onboard were:

21st SOS

Knife 61/Thunder Chicken

Maj C D Taylor (Pilot)

Lt Col Ted D Silva (Copilot)

SSgt Clarence W.
Cossiboom (FE)

MSgt Kenneth G. Reynolds
(FE)

21st SOS

**Knife 62/Motown
Magic**

Maj Philip J Conran
(Pilot)

Capt Pete L Costa
(Copilot)

TSgt Wilburn T.
Franklin (FE)

MSgt Homer L.
Ramsey (FE)

On board each helicopter were 26 members of the Special Guerrilla Unit that were being inserted.

The rescue crewmembers were:

Det 2 40th ARRS

HH-53/Jolly Green 71

Holly G Bell (Pilot)

Gary F Sanderson (Copilot)

Jack L Hartman (FE)

John E Wilson (PJ)

Det 2 40th ARRS

**HH-53/Jolly Green
72**

Gary L Nelson (Pilot)

James H Wegman
(Copilot)

Stephen L LeBeau

Anthony R Gargano (PJ) (FE)

Jeffrey L Whitted (AP) Jack D Moran (PJ)

Anthony J McFarr
(PJ)

P/U 5-USAF/46-Indigenous

P/U 3-USAF

A1-E/Sandy 07

Jackson L Hudson (Pilot)

JG 19 shot up on first attempt.

*JG 71 landed for p/u; AFC for Maj Phil Conran
(Knife 62A) and Capt Jackson L Hudson (Sandy
07), DFC for John E. Wilson (PJ).*

*JG 72 took hits also; Silver Star for Anthony J
McFarr (PJ)*

*CBU-19 (Sawdust) used in order to effect rescue
before nightfall.*

(JG info from Bob LaPoint's data base)

INDIVIDUAL'S STATEMENT OF THEIR RECOLLECTION OF THAT DAY

CLICK

Bob Arnau

CLICK

Bill Crawford

CLICK

Matthew Kirkpatrick (20th
SOS)

CLICK

Phil Conran

As the result of their actions on this day two individuals received their country's second highest award, **The Air Force Cross**.



**Philip J.
Conran**

Major, U.S.
Air Force

Date of Action:

October 06,
1969



Citation:

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Title 10, Section 8742, United States Code, awards the Air Force Cross to Colonel Philip J. Conran (then Major), for extraordinary heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force as Aircraft Commander of a CH-3E helicopter at a classified location in Southeast Asia on 6 October 1969. On that date, while attempting to rescue the crew of a downed helicopter, Major Conran's aircraft was hit by intense hostile ground fire and he was forced to make a crash landing in the vicinity of the other aircraft. Once on the ground, he successfully evacuated his aircraft and assumed a major role in defending the crash site against an overwhelming hostile force until rescue was possible six hours later. Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship, and aggressiveness in the face of hostile fire, Major Conran reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

[CLICK](#)

Read recommendation for award of **The Medal of Honor** for Major Conran

[CLICK](#)

Read news article

Jackson L. Hudson

Captain, U.S. Air Force

Date of Action: October 6, 1969

Citation:

The Air Force Cross is presented to Jackson L. Hudson, Captain, U.S. Air Force, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force as the pilot of an A-1E Skyraider on October 6, 1969. Captain Hudson led, and was responsible for the success of, one of the largest search and rescue efforts ever attempted in Southeast Asia. With complete disregard for his own safety and despite extremely intense ground fire, he made several low level passes delivering ordnance within ten meters of the survivors' positions. He led and coordinated the final attack, which eventually incapacitated an estimated 400 to 600 enemy forces and saved the lives of 54 persons. Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship and aggressiveness in the face of hostile forces, Captain Hudson has reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

It is believed that the pictures below are what remains of CH-3E 64-14222 (Knife 61). The three pictures (C, D & E) were taken by Skip Chervak a member of the TLCB. His comments are below.

"I am the one that took those three photos. They were taken right in the center of Muang Phin. I was told that it was not shot down there, but somewhere in the surrounding hills. It was shot down by two women gunners. There were no visible tail numbers on it. I'm afraid that that is all I remember."

It is unknown who took the other two photos (A & B).



Comments by Bob Arnau extracted from
http://www.rotorheadsrus.us/documents/Bob_Arnau.pdf

In October 1969, we lost two CH-3E's on the Bolivens Plateau in a helicopter trap set by a company size force of the North Vietnamese Army. This was on one of the 7th/13th AF/DOSA missions that we flew in support of the CIA efforts in the Laotian panhandle. I was in the SAR center in the command post throughout that day with the DCO. Eight CH-3 crewmembers with the 50 Laotian troops they were inserting were pinned down in a small depression in an open area. (The lead helicopter was on the ground and the second just about to touchdown when the NV opened fire.) Their A-1 escorts provided support but the NV were well dug in. Several attempts were made throughout a very long day by HH-53 Jollys to pick them up. However, each time the Jolly's had to abort with battle damage (several damaged HH-53's landed at NKP). Finally at dusk, the wind dropped off and the A-1's delivered "Peanuts" (non-lethal debilitating gas) which allowed two HH-53's to make the pickup. Six of our crewmembers and 49 Laotians got on the first Jolly leaving two lonely 21st SOS crewmembers on the ground. However, # 2 Jolly was right behind and picked them up. One Laotian had been killed but everyone else got out. (Phil Conran, aircraft commander of one of the downed Knife CH-3s, returned to one of the aircraft under heavy fire to recover an M-60 machine gun and ammunition to assist in their defense. Phil was recommended for the Medal of Honor and received the Air Force Cross -the Nation's second highest award for valor -for his actions in recovering the machine gun and leading the downed group's defense throughout the day even after being wounded. Ted Silva, the squadron commander, flying as Phil's co-pilot, received a deep crease in his back from a round. As I recall, several Laotians were also wounded.)

Comments by Gerard "Jerry" Bucknall
CH-3E/67-14702/15 Jan 69

On 15 January 69, I was flying with Maj. Henery and Capt Adams on a fateful mission.

As I remember it, we were coming out of Nam from an over night stay due to a long mission the day before. We were a three bird gaggle and we were the low (lead) bird. We had no real data pertaining to angels or anything ---- no current codes because we were not on a mission, only dead heading home.

It might have been a FAC but not sure who flagged us to help out in a pick up of a downed pilot. Understand, we were just RTB, when we got a call to assist. After minimal coordination we decided to give it a try and we wound up in a trap.

VC machine guns were at the spot we were vectored into. Within seconds our number two engine, control tubes and hydraulic accumulators were gone. I remember the red mist in the cabin from the compressed air and hydraulic fluid. Rounds came up through the floors and in through the door. Everything seemed to be coming from the right side. We banked up and to the left (uncontrolled flight) did a 360 and went in hard. I remember everything flying around the cabin it felt as if we were almost inverted.

After we hit we exited with our weapons and gear and set up a perimeter off the nose of the ship. Maj Henerey got on the radio and started calling for assistance. Since we were in direct sight of our sister ships we had no trouble correlating our position. We all had our radios out but only Gerry talked.

If I remember correctly, Capt Adams was badly hurt. I remember I had my M-60 and the M-79 grenade launcher along with ammo. I looked back at the ship and it looked like a big spider with smoke coming out of the engine areas. The tail boom was broken and leaning off to the side, the front cockpit windows shattered and the electronics compartment door was pushed up to the window areas. The spider effect came from the blades, broken and hanging down. From the front it looked like a big dark spider smoking from its head. That particular sight remains in my memory till this day.

Anyway, the attempt was made to get a Jolly Green to assist, they seemed to be in the area, not sure why. It was determined the area was too hot, VC were said to be on the ground and coming our way, Jolly Green did not want to come in at that time.

Number two bird (I believe it was Capt Shetter, not sure about the name) said we are not leaving our own down there and came in and picked us up. An experience I'll never forget. Things could have been quite different had it not been for the courage of our brothers on the number two ship.

Evidently we did everything right as we were referred to at the jungle school in the P.I. after that as part of the references of what to do in the event you get shot down.

Anyway, memories do flood back with the appropriate stimuli, sometimes vague but always there. If my recollection is inaccurate in any way, it's mine and I'll stay with it.

(Jerry Bucknall)

HH-53C/68-8285/21 Jul 71

Okay. About my 2nd shootdown (21 July 1971) when I was with the 40th ARRS Jolly Greens.

We (Myself as FE, Maj. Clyde Bennett as Pilot, Capt. Hugh something or other (CRS) we called him "Butch" as Co-Pilot and 2 PJ's; S/Sgt Jon Holberg, S/Sgt Chuck McGrath) were tasked to recover an unmanned reconnaissance drone out of Northern Laos and return it to NKP. We would be a single bird mission. Our call sign was JG 54 (HH-53C 68-8285).

The longest sling rig we could find was only about 50 ft. long. The Intelligence guys told us "Don't worry, There are no real tall trees in the area". Just for good measure, we brought some extra 2000 lb. cargo straps on board that we could use in a pinch.

We were told that there were no hostile forces in the area and it would be a piece of cake. When we got up north of Vientien we were to contact "Raven" (don't remember the rest of his call sign) and he would take us to within visual of the Drone.

WELLLLLL, the weather was shitty with low clouds. The MSL altitude of the recovery site was about 6000 ft. on the side of a hill and the trees had to be about 150 to 200 feet tall. We hovered over the site and discussed what we thought we should do. It was decided by all that we could tie a series of cargo straps to the sling we had until it was long enough to reach the ground and then lower it all through the cargo sling hatch.

But before we could do that we needed to take on some fuel because we certainly couldn't hook up to a tanker with the Drone on a sling and we didn't have enough fuel to get back to NKP. We called for a tanker and arranged to meet him at 11,000 feet further south of our location. We took on some fuel and then went back down to where we thought the Drone was.

Wouldn't you know it, some more clouds had moved into the area and we couldn't find the damn thing. We called the "Raven" and he said Don't worry I'll take you to it. Well with some effort he did and we finally got back over the Drone.

I put Jon Holberg on the ground with the rescue hoist and Chuck and I tied all the cargo straps to the sling and put it down through the hole. Jon said it was too short by about a couple of feet. I told the pilot to go lower and by the time Jon said he had enough sling to hook up, we were sitting with the belly of the chopper in the tops of the trees.

I was standing in the door getting ready to lower the hoist so I could bring Jon back up into the chopper and all of a sudden I heard a loud "Bang" and we started settling into the trees. I hit the quick release on my gunners belt and dove onto my belly by the cargo sling door with the intention of releasing the cargo sling.

Too Late! By that time we were in the trees with the main rotor blades doing their best to chop down all those trees. Then the Bird started to roll down the hill. Without my gunners belt on, I was rolling around and banging around inside that thing like a BB in a tin can.

Finally it stopped rolling and I found myself lying on my back on the ceiling of the cabin soaked in JP-4 and God knows what else. I thought to myself "I've got to get out of here, this thing is going to catch fire". I saw a hole in the side and daylight. I stumbled through that and saw one of the engines lying in the grass, still spooling down.

I ran as best I could to what I thought was a safe distance from the Chopper and laid down because my back was really hurting. Pretty soon Maj. Bennett came over to me and ask me how I was. I told him I thought my back was broken. He said okay don't move. Jon is hurt really bad and Chuck is doing what he can for him. Help is on the way.

It was about that time that I thought I heard some gunfire but I couldn't be sure. Chuck finished doing what he could for Jon and came over to look at me. He checked me over and said that he thought my back was broken. He also told me that a piece of rotor blade had hit Jon and took off his whole lower jaw and he was bleeding pretty bad.

We had made such a big hole when we crashed that an Air America Huey landed and picked up Jon and I and took us to the Swiss Red Cross Hospital in Vientien. I Guess it was the next morning when they flew us out to NKP.

By the way, the guy flying the Raven was named Jim Roper. He has written a book oddly enough called "Raven" and there is a whole chapter in the book about that day and JG 54.

My back was broken in 3 places and after I got back to a hospital in the States, they found that my pelvis had also been broken but it was too late to do anything about it because by the time they discovered it, it had started to heal.

In the hospital at NKP they discovered that I had chemical burns on my back from the JP-4 and started to treat that.

While I was in the hospital at NKP somebody told me that they had sent a chopper in there from the 21st SOS to the crash site to take pictures and they took a lot of ground fire. In fact, one of

the Pilots (I forget his name) from the 40th who went along as an observer got shot through both his legs.

I also learned that the day before we went up there they had tried to get an Army CH-54 Crane in there and they had taken so much ground fire that they had to withdraw and abort their mission. Joy, Joy, Joy!!!!!!!

Anyway, after they got me stabilized at the hospital in NKP, they sent me to Clark AFB in the P.I. After about 10 days there, they sent me to Japan for some more treatment. Then they sent me to Scott AFB for a couple of days. From Scott they sent me to Fitzsimmons Army hospital in Denver. Finally they sent me to Offutt AFB in Omaha which was the closest hospital to where my wife was in Topeka KS.

Because of my injuries, the Doctors wanted to put me out of the service on full disability. But I only had 4 years to go till retirement and I told them no. They said okay, that I had 30 days convalescent leave coming and during that time if I could find another job other than flying, I could stay in the service.

I was a mess. I had a full hyper extension brace on when I left the hospital and looked like Frankenstein when I walked.

Long story short. I called in a few favors and got back into my old career field for the next 4 years so I could retire.

An interesting footnote to this whole thing was when they put Jon Holberg and I into the Air America Huey, he was on his hands and knees and bleeding very badly. I looked over at him and saw that he was writing with his finger dipping in his own blood "Where we going"... Thats what I call bravery!!!!

(J D Adams)

(View the [PJs story](#) of JG 54 along with a couple of pictures)



Drone Rescue

by

Chuck McGrath

PJ, 40th ARRS, NKP 1971-72

I was rescued by an Air America H-34 crew on 21 July 1971.

Location: Some distance north of the PDJ.

We were tasked as a single Jolly Green (HH-53) crew to recover a drone, and ended up going down during the effort just as we were picking the #1 PJ by hoist.

Rollled over a couple times and ended up against some trees. Loss was later determined to be from groundfire in the area. Crews involved in the rescue saw the Jolly upside down up against some trees on the downslope side of a small clearing. Drone in middle of clearing. Tip tanks were jettisoned in area of drone. Drone parachute in trees at upper end of clearing. Three crewmembers (pilot, copilot, and FE) at lower end of slope. Two others (PJs) about the middle of the clearing.

A Huey came in first. Picked up the FE, suffering from severe back pains, (later learned he had ruptured disc in spine), by having him grab the skids so they could hover taxi with him further up the slope to where I was with the other PJ, who had extensive facial injuries. My partner was hit by a rotor blade as the helo went down. We got the FE in the Huey, I

passed Jon's IV bottle up to someone in the Huey, and then we got Jon in. I got in to help treat them.

I guess there wasn't enough lift to get us out of there, because one of the Air America crew tapped me on the shoulder and motioned for me to get out. Just what I needed! Out I go. Huey spins around, comes close to giving me a crewcut with the tail rotor, and exits successfully.

About 10 minutes later a H-34 comes in and picks up pilot and copilot with hoist and horse collar. Hoist breaks with me about 10 feet up and I'm back on the ground again with the hoist operator reeling in the cable by hand as they exit the area.

I heard some periodic ground fire while taking stock of the situation.

I guess it was about 10 or 15 minutes later - who kept track? Another H-34 came in and picked me up by horse collar. We were all taken to Lima 54, where the pilot, copilot, and I got a hop on an Air America C-130 to Udorn. The three of us were bruised up, nothing serious, but they stuck us in the hospital there for the night. I still don't

know how the injured FE and my partner got back to Udorn, but they were there in the hospital when we woke up the next morning.

Comments by James Adams
CH-3E/65-05691/27 June 69



It was aircraft CH-3E 65-05691, Knife 22 I was on when we were shot down at Lima Site 108 (Moung Soui) on the Plain of Jars on 27 June, 1969. Myself, Major Henery, Major Mattos and Hernand "Willie" Wilson were on it that day.

An interesting thing happened when we left NKP that morning. We were about 30 to 40 minutes out of NKP and we got a main transmission chip light. We made a precautionary landing at Udorn and I checked out the MGB chip detector. All I could find was one (1) tiny chip on the detector, so we decided to go ahead and join up at Lima Site #20 with the rest of the 21st SOS. birds.

We sat idle at Lima Site #20 waiting for the official word to go ahead and take them out of there.

We were evacuating some Thai Mercenaries out of Moung Soui when the North Vietnamese came across the PDJ to capture the base. We had picked up the Mercenaries and were about 20 feet off of the ground when we took ground fire. I got the little Gomer out of the left side with my M-60 who shot at us and then down we went.

Willy and I got everyone (including the Thai Mercenaries) off the bird. I then organized the Mercenaries around the chopper and began to return fire to the tree line where the first guy had shot at us.

We were able to fend off the bad guys and were picked up by an Air America H-34 and flown back to Lima Site #20.

For some reason, someone decided I deserved a Silver Star and they gave it to me. (James (J.D.) Adams)

(Picture courtesy of J D Adams, Lt to Rt Maj Mattos, Hernand "Willie" Wilson, J. D. Adams, Maj Henery)

(Thanks to Lew Taylor, the helicopter behind the guys in the picture is CH-3E 66-13293/Talley-ho Soul Serenade, previously was Susie Wong)

Comments by Bill Crawford

Comments by Matthew Kirkpatrick (20th SOS)

Comments by Phil Conran