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165

470 (Capt Nelsen/2687)

24 November 1969

Mission Narrative Report #2-3-072-22 Nov 69

3 ARRGp (JSARC)
APO 96307

1. (U) This report is submitted in accordance with ARRSN 55-2/3 ARRGp Sup 1, dated 11 Jul 68.
2. (S) On 22 Nov 69, JG 76 and JG 71 were on strip alert at Channel 89 when they were alerted for a rescue scramble at 0135. Both JG's were airborne at 0146 and proceeded to the SAR location at 102/72/89 to attempt the rescue of Popular 02. Radio contact was made with both survivors and they were reported to be in good condition at 102/78/89. At 0200, Nail 48 revised the coordinates to 112/90/89 and reported that Alpha's chute was in a tree and Bravo's was in a clearing; they also reported that the call sign be Taproom 02 A/B. At approximately 0230, 02B reported that he was being surrounded, that it appeared he would not be killed and his last words were "I guess I am a prisoner of war". Five minutes later Alpha reported that he was not in a tree; but was hiding 10 meters west of his chute which was in the trees. Their actual position was 103/72/89 and JG 76 moved to within 5 miles of the survivors location to maintain a ready position in case an immediate rescue attempt was required. There were two layers of broken clouds in the immediate area, one at 3000 feet, and the other at about 8000 feet. JG 76 maintained 9500 feet to stay above the cloud decks which gave protection from small arms fire. At 0240, Sandy Lead cleared JG 76 in for the pickup and put down two smoke bombs to guide us into the area. The other Sandy's had layed a smoke screen to the north of the survivor where small arms fire was reported. JG 76 autorotated from 9500 feet to 3000 feet to expedite the rescue and keep from passing over AAA gun sites. Then a rapid descent along the ridge line to the north of the rescue area was made to get some protection from the gun emplacements located all around the area. Sandy guided the Jolly into the area, and asked Taproom 02A to pop his smoke. Because JG 76 made a rapid approach into the area, the smoke from Alpha's flare did not come up from the trees until JG 76 was directly over his position. A sharp left 180° turn was initiated and JG 76 hovered over the survivor. Just as the hover was initiated, ground fire from automatic weapons was reported from the Jolly's 5 o'clock position and the #3 gunner quickly silenced that position. At 0255 the survivor was on board and JG 76 departed the area quickly. Sandy 4 reported an automatic weapon site firing on JG 76 and he rolled in to silence that position located 1/4 to 1/2 mile east of the pickup position. At 0300, a Spectre aircraft reported that the Jolly's were being fired upon from 37 mm gun positions, and many rapid evasive maneuvers were made until out of the area and away from

76

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400-69-0025 GROUP 4
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166

the route structure. At 0315, JG 76 and 71 were ordered to stay in orbit for a possible attempt to rescue Taproom 02B with the aid of CBU-19. Sandy 1 said that he was 99% sure that Taproom 02B was captured and further attempts would result only in the loss of more aircraft. At 0345, an air refueling was completed on JG 76 and JG 71, and confirmation was received to remain in the area with 02 Alpha aboard. Because of the survivor's great concern over his co-pilot, JG 76 requested permission to return to Channel 89 fearing that Alpha might go into shock. At 0407, Jolly Green 76 was cleared to return to Channel 89 and subsequently return to the SAR area. Sandy 1 advised that the winds were picking up and that CBU-19 would be ineffective. At 0420, all forces were RTB'd and JG 76 landed at 0436. JG 71 landed at 0450. The survivor's name was:

Lt Herbert C. Wheeler
VF143
CVA 64
FPO S. F.

3. The rescue crews were:

Jolly Green 76 (Low)

AC: Capt Gary L. Nelsen,
CP: Capt Stephen R. Olsen,
FE: SSgt Donald LaBarre,
RS: ALC Terry E. Caffery,
RS: Sgt Charles L. Colbert,
AP: Sgt Gregory A. Anderson,

Jolly Green 71 (High)

AC: Capt Carroll N. Kessler,
CP: Capt Richard M. Baskett,
FE: Sgt William C. Shinn,
RS: Sgt Anthony J. McFerr.
RS: SSgt John J. Eldridge,

SIGNED

GRAY L. NELSEN, Captain, USAF
Aircraft Commander

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400-69-0025

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL (SECOND OAK LEAF CLUSTER)

AIRMAN FIRST CLASS TERRY E. CAFFERY

Distinguished himself by meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight over Southeast Asia on **22 November 1969.** . On that date, he superbly accomplished a highly intricate mission to support Free World forces that were combatting aggression. His energetic application of his knowledge and skill were significant factors that contributed greatly to furthering United States goals in Southeast Asia. His professional skill and airmanship reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

UNOFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE 40th ARRS

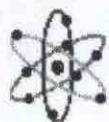
<http://jollygreen.org>

November 1969

22 November

Capt Gary Nelso (A/C) and Capt Olsen make pickup at 103/73/89. They pickup Lt Wheeler UNS, call sign TAPE

PS'S	TERRY CAFFERY	SGT
	CHARLES COLBERT	SGT
FE	LARS ARE DONALD	SSGT



BEDINGER, HENRY JAMES



Name: Henry James Bedinger
Rank/Branch: O2/US Navy
Unit: Fighter Squadron 143, USS CONSTELLATION (CVA 64), pilot
Date of Birth: 30 March 1945 (Philadelphia PA)
Home City of Record: Hatboro PA
Date of Loss: 22 November 1969
Country of Loss: Laos
Loss Coordinates: 163740N 1055807E (XD033385)
Status (in 1973): Released POW
Category:
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: F4J
Missions: 30
Other Personnel in Incident: Herbert Wheeler, pilot

Source: Compiled by Homecoming II Project 15 May 1990 from one or more of the following: raw data from U.S. Government agency sources, correspondence with POW/MIA families, published sources, interviews. Updated by the P.O.W. NETWORK.

REMARKS: 730327 RELSD BY PL

SYNOPSIS: The USS CONSTELLATION provided air power to the U.S. effort in Vietnam early in the war, having participated in strikes against Loc Chao and Hon Gai in North Vietnam during August 1964. One of the first American POWs of the war, and certainly one of the most well-known, LTJG Everett Alvarez, launched from her decks and was captured during this series of strikes in 1964. The CONSTELLATION was large and carried a full range of aircraft. Fighters from her air wing, CVW-14, earned the carrier the Meritorious Unit Commendation in 1968 during a particularly intense period of air attacks. VF-96, a premier fighter squadron awarded the Clifton Trophy two straight years, flew from the CONSTELLATION in October 1971. During this period, two of her pilots, LT Randall H. Cunningham and LTJG William "Willie" Driscoll became the first American aces of the Vietnam War, having shot down five Russian-made MiG enemy aircraft. The CONSTELLATION remained on station throughout most of the war.

One of the aircraft launched from the decks of the CONSTELLATION was the F4 Phantom fighter jet. The Phantom, used by Air Force, Marine and Navy air wings, served a multitude of functions including fighter-bomber and interceptor, photo and electronic surveillance. The two man aircraft was extremely fast (Mach 2), and had a long range (900 - 2300 miles, depending on stores and mission type). The F4 was also extremely maneuverable and handled well at low and high altitudes. The F4 was selected for a number of state-of-the-art electronics conversions, which improved radar intercept and computer bombing capabilities enormously. Most pilots considered it one of the "hottest" planes around.

LTJG Henry J. Bedinger was an F4J Naval Flight Officer assigned to Fighter Squadron 143 onboard the USS CONSTELLATION. On November 22, 1969, he and his pilot, LT Herbert Wheeler, were launched from the carrier on a reconnaissance mission over Laos. Their call sign was "TAPROOM".

During the flight, as they were over Savannakhet Province approximately 10 miles west-southwest of the city of Sepone, the aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and the crew was forced to eject. Two full parachutes were sighted by other aircraft in the area and contact was made on their survival radios. The pilot, LT Wheeler, was recovered by search and rescue helicopters. Bedinger radioed that he was surrounded by enemy troops. This, along with heavy small arms fire from the ground, prohibited a helicopter rescue of LTJG Bedinger. His last radio transmission was, "I guess I'm a prisoner of war." Oriental voices were heard on the rescue frequency several times after his last message.

Bedinger had been captured by the North Vietnamese operating in Laos. He was immediately moved to North Vietnam where he spent the next 3 1/2 years as a prisoner of war. Unlike other POWs, however, Bedinger was held apart from Americans captured in North Vietnam, although he was put in with an American civilian shot down in Laos, Ernie Brace.

At the end of the war, Bedinger and about a dozen others were presented as the so-called "Laos prisoners." The original list of releasees did not include a single man missing in Laos, and after considerable haggling, these men, who were captured in Laos but moved immediately to North Vietnam, were included on the list of the returnees. It was generally presumed that these men were held by the Pathet Lao, and they were "officially" released by the Pathet Lao, but they met their Lao "captors" on the day of their release. Bedinger had spent only ten days in Laos; most of those ten days were consumed in travel to North Vietnam.

Nearly 600 Americans were lost in Laos during American involvement in the Vietnam war. Although the Pathet Lao stated during the war that they held "tens of tens" of American prisoners of war, no negotiations were conducted which would secure the freedom of these men.

Since the war ended, nearly 10,000 reports relating to Americans missing, prisoner or unaccounted for in Southeast Asia have been received by the U.S. Government. Many authorities who have examined this largely classified information are convinced that hundreds of Americans are still held captive today. These reports are the source of serious distress to many returned American prisoners. They had a code that no one could honorably return unless all of the prisoners returned. Not only that code of honor, but the honor of our country is at stake as long as even one man remains unjustly held. It's time we brought our men home.

Jim Bedinger remained in the service and worked in the office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon in the late 1980's. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant during his captivity, and in the late 1980's had the rank of Commander.

SOURCE: WE CAME HOME copyright 1977

Captain and Mrs. Frederic A Wyatt (USNR Ret), Barbara Powers Wyatt, Editor
P.O.W. Publications, 10250 Moorpark St., Toluca Lake, CA 91602

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UPDATE - 09/95 by the P.O.W. NETWORK, Skidmore, MO

HENRY J. BEDINGER

Lieutenant- United States Navy

Captured in Laos: November 22, 1969

Released: March 28, 1973

I was born 30 March 1945 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and was raised in the suburbs north of Philadelphia (Hatboro Upper Morehead, Pa) I attended Meadowbrook School in Pennsylvania; St. Peters School, Peekskill, New York; and Union College, Schenectady, New York where I received a BA in History in 1967. I was commissioned on 25 August 1967 through the Aviation Volunteer Reserve Officer Candidate program at Pensacola, Florida. I was married to Miss Laura Yopez of Patchogue Long Island, New York on 23 December 1967 and received my wings in May 1968. I was captured 22 November 1969 while flying an F-4 aircraft. Our first son, Daniel Michael, was born 9 March 1974. My plans are for a career in the United States Navy.

I can remember visiting the Liberty Bell as a small boy and wondering if it could really ring. Today I know it still rings "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

November 1996

Henry Bedinger retired from the United States Navy as a Commander. He and Laura live in California.

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