

13Apr72 Bengal 505

On this date in ARS history, a crew from the 40th ARRS NKP Royal Thai AFB, successfully rescued USMC pilot Major Clyde D. Smith who was downed in Laos. Smiths' call sign was Bengal 505 He was flying an A-6 and was shot down at 1800L on 9 September, six miles northeast of Tchepone, Laos.

An OV-10 FAC located the survivor at first light on 10 April. The survivor was located in an extremely heavily defended area of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. On 30 March, Spectre 22 an AC-130 was shot down in the same area. Over the years, dozens of other aircraft had been downed there. This area was a well known hot spot respected by anyone who had a mission to fly in it.

For the next three days fighters flew close air support to protect the downed pilot. Major James C. Harding, Sandy 1, flying an A-1 Skyraider was the on scene commander throughout the SAR. HC-130's orbiting high but nearby were the airborne mission commander and tankers for the helicopters. Jolly's orbited near by each day but the area was much too hostile to try a pickup until 13 April. Then, HH-53 Jolly Green 32 went in for the pickup.

The Jolly 32 crew were:

- Captain Ben Orrell, aircraft commander
- 1 Lt Jim Casey, Co-pilot
- A1C Bill Liles, FE
- Sgt William Brinson, PJ
- A1C Kenneth Cakebread, PJ

During the pickup, Sgt Brinson was wounded but told his pilot he was OK and to continue the pickup. Following this epic SAR, Major Harding (Sandy 1) and Jolly 32 pilot Captain Orrell were both awarded the Air Force Cross. The rest of the Jolly 32 crew were awarded the Silver Star. Sgt. Brinson was also awarded the Purple Heart. It was a day in history that they will never forget.

Note 1: You can read Orrell's AFC narratives at

http://www.pjsinnam.com/Medals/AF_Cross.htm

You can read Bill Brinson's Silver Star narrative at

http://www.pjsinnam.com/Medals/Silver_Star.htm

If anyone is in touch with Ken Cakebread, ask him to email a copy of his Silver Star narrative to rlapointe@gci.net and I will post it on line with the rest of the known recipients of that award. The same is true for the copilot Jim Casey and the FE Bill Liles.

Note 2: There is supposed to be an audio tape of this SAR. Does anyone have a copy of it?

Pasted in below are excerpts written by the survivor in an article he put together about his experience:

The pickup. For the next four to five hours there was non-stop bombing and constant chatter on the radio. About 1700, Sandy 01 told me to get ready and stay up on the radio-the Jolly was five minutes out. I put new batteries in my radio so I wouldn't have radio failure at the last moment-without radio contact, they would not pick up anyone. I stood up for the first time in about 10 hours, took out my flare gun and signal flares, and-with the radio to my ear-listened to what seemed like controlled chaos.

Sandy 01 had at least four other Sandys to direct [actually seven], three or four Nail FACs controlling the 10-15 fighters that were suppressing the AAA sites, and two Jollies holding 10 miles out. Overall, 25 to 30 fast moving aircraft were operating in a confined airspace for over an hour dropping all kinds of bombs, rockets, smoke, and cluster munitions. One man-Sandy 01-was orchestrating the whole show. Not one life or aircraft was lost, and they didn't hit the survivor. What a great tribute to the skill of the aircrews-and the skill, guts, leadership, and determination of Major Jim Harding.

I heard him tell Sandy 02, "Go get Jolly 32, and bring him in." The rescue effort had never gotten this far before, and I had to keep telling myself: stay calm, don't lose it now, think about what you have to do to help the situation. I know the guys on the Jolly (piloted by Captain Ben Orrell and First Lieutenant Jim Casey) were sweating bullets just as I was.

Sandy 02 fired smoke rockets in front of Jolly 32 to mark the way to my position. The helicopter began taking ground fire immediately upon starting the run-in. The rear ramp was down and Sergeant Bill Brinson Manned the mini-gun there; Airman First Class Bill Liles and Airman First Class Kenneth Cakebread were the door gunners. Brinson was hit in the knee early on the run-in.

As recorded on tape:

"I'm hit but I'm okay," (Brinson)

"Can you still shoot?" (Orrell)

"I'm alright, they just go me in the knee, but there's some holes in the helo," (Brinson)

Jolly 32 took 11 hits including one through the front windshield. Sandy 01 guided the final approach. As the helicopter reached my position, he called Orrell:

"Pull up Jolly, pull up, you're right over the survivor.

"I don't see him," Orrell said, whereupon Sandy called me.

"Pop your smoke, Bengal 505, pop your smoke."

I popped a flare, but the helicopter's downwash pushed the red smoke down into the gully and they couldn't pick it up. By this time, Jolly 32 had been in a hover for an extended period, which was becoming a concern to all.

"I don't see him, tell him to pop his night end."

Immediately, I turned my flare around and pulled the tab (just like a highway flare) and it ignited, showering me with sparks.

I had been told not to chase the helo-to let it come to me. But when Orrell said-for the third time-that he still couldn't see me, I decided it was time to move. I went up the hill and out into an open area pocked with craters and litter with fallen trees. Smoke hung in the air. I saw what appeared to be some sort of cloth tied around a tree. It looked like a trail marker; maybe that NVA did see me that first evening and they had decided to use me as bait for a deadly trap.

At the top of the ridge, I saw Jolly 32 so low the rotor blades were cutting off tops of trees and slinging them in every direction. The helo was 50 to 60 yards distant and moving farther away. The door gunner/winch operator (Liles) was looking away from me. I ran toward the helo hollering on the radio, "Right here, right here, behind you, behind you!" There was so much noise on the radio I don't know how he heard me, even though I was screaming at the top of my lungs-but he turned and looked right at me and said "I got him, I got him." Orrell told him to lower the hoist.

We had been told time and again to let the hoist's bullet-shaped jungle penetrator-which folds out to provide a three-pronged seat-hit the ground first to dissipate any static electricity. Concern about getting shocked by the penetrator, however, was really down on my list of priorities at this point. I grabbed the cable with one hand when the penetrator was still five feet off the ground, and snapped the climber's snaplink on my torso harness to the cable with my other hand; I may have set a hook-up record. Except for my helmet, I had all my flight gear on. Immediately, I felt a tug on my harness as Liles took up the slack.

When I go up to the door, he rolled me in, said, "Get the hell out of the way," swung his mini-gun back around into the door opening, and fired in the direction I had come from. The interior was filled with smoke, empty shell casings flying all over, and three gunners firing in every direction. Light streamed in through bullet holes in the deck and overhead. Almost simultaneously, Liles told Orrell, "He's in the door, let's get the hell out of here."

Everything is relative. My situation had gone from bad to wonderful in those last few seconds and I was exhilarated-as far as I was concerned, it was over. The Jolly crew, on the other hand, knew that it was far from over-things could still get very bad very quickly.

Sandy 01 immediately advised, "Stay low, stay low, and go out the same way you came in." We got shot at all the way to Thailand. The bad guys must have been upset to have absorbed all that punishment, and then watched me snatched from the trap.

We landed in Nakhon Phanom about 90 minutes after the pickup to a huge reception on the flight line-a very proud group of men and women who had worked day and night and risked their lives to rescue me, and succeeded. Their pride was exceeded only by the gratitude of one very humble Marine aviator.

Someone who looked like Charlton Heston walked up to me. "Hi, " he said, "I'm Sandy 01,"-it was Jim Harding. We threw our arms around each other. To this day I have no idea what we said. When he arrived overhead that first day, I had pictured him as some old guy who got stuck in Spads instead of fighters-a perception quickly dispelled when I heard his engine quit followed by his explanation to his wingman that he didn't know how much gas he had in his centerline tank [but wanted to use very drop of it] so he just let it run dry and then selected the other tank when the engine quit. When I heard that, I knew I was in good hands.