

On this day in ARS history 25 May 1970, Pararescueman Luther E. Davis died of injuries incurred during the 15 April 1970 shootdown of his HH-3E during the SAR of Bikini 28, a U.S. Army UH-1 in South Vietnam. Also killed because of this crash was the pilot Travis H. Scott and flight engineer Gerald L. Hartzel. Let us take a moment today to remember these men who gave their lives "That Others May Live."



Luther E. Davis

Below is the story of the Jolly 27 shootdown written by Robert Lapointe using SAR mission reports and JOPREP JIFFY message traffic obtained from the USAF Historical Research Agency as the primary source documents.

On 15 April 1970, SSgt Luther E. Davis and Sgt. Gary T. Osborne were the alert PJ's on the HH-3E's assigned to the 37th ARRS DaNang AB Republic of Vietnam. By the end of this day, Sergeant Osborne would rescue Sergeant Davis; but, the happiness of a successful pickup would end in anguish. This is the story of PJ Luther E. Davis, his Jolly Green crew, the men who rescued Luther's crew and in the process almost became casualties themselves.

It was Wednesday in Vietnam and before sunrise two crews preflighted their HH-3E's, callsigns Jolly Greens 27 and 21. Jolly 27 was designated low bird and crewed by pilot Captain Travis H. Scott, copilot Major Travis Wofford, flight engineer TSgt Gerald L. Hartzel, and PJ SSgt Luther E. Davis. Jolly 21 was their high bird and crewed by pilot Major Lewis E. Garrett, copilot Captain Jimmie Blackwood, flight engineer SSgt Thayer D. Pope and PJ Gary T. Osborne.

Both crews were experienced combat veterans and most were volunteers for duty in Vietnam. PJ Luther Davis had served an earlier tour of duty with the 37th in 1966-67. He volunteered for a second tour and returned to DaNang in August 1969.

At 1330, the scramble klaxon howled and the rescuemen raced to their Jolly's. They were told that an Army UH-1 was down 53 miles south-southwest of DaNang. After takeoff they climbed to an altitude of 6000 feet, headed SSW, contacted King 06, and

informed the AMC of their ETA at the site of the SAR. King informed them that four A-1 Skyraiders were also enroute with the callsigns of Spad 03, 04, 11, 12. A-1 units were assigned to squadrons at several bases in Southeast Asia. Each squadron had a unique callsign. These callsigns were:

Squadron	Bases Assigned	Callsign
1st SOS	NKP RTAFB and the following bases in RVN: Bien Hoa, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, and Pleiku	Hobo
22nd SOS	NKP RTAFB	Zorro
6th SOS	Pleiku RVN	Spad
602nd SOS	NKP and Udorn RTAFB and Bien Hoa and Pleiku RVN	Firefly

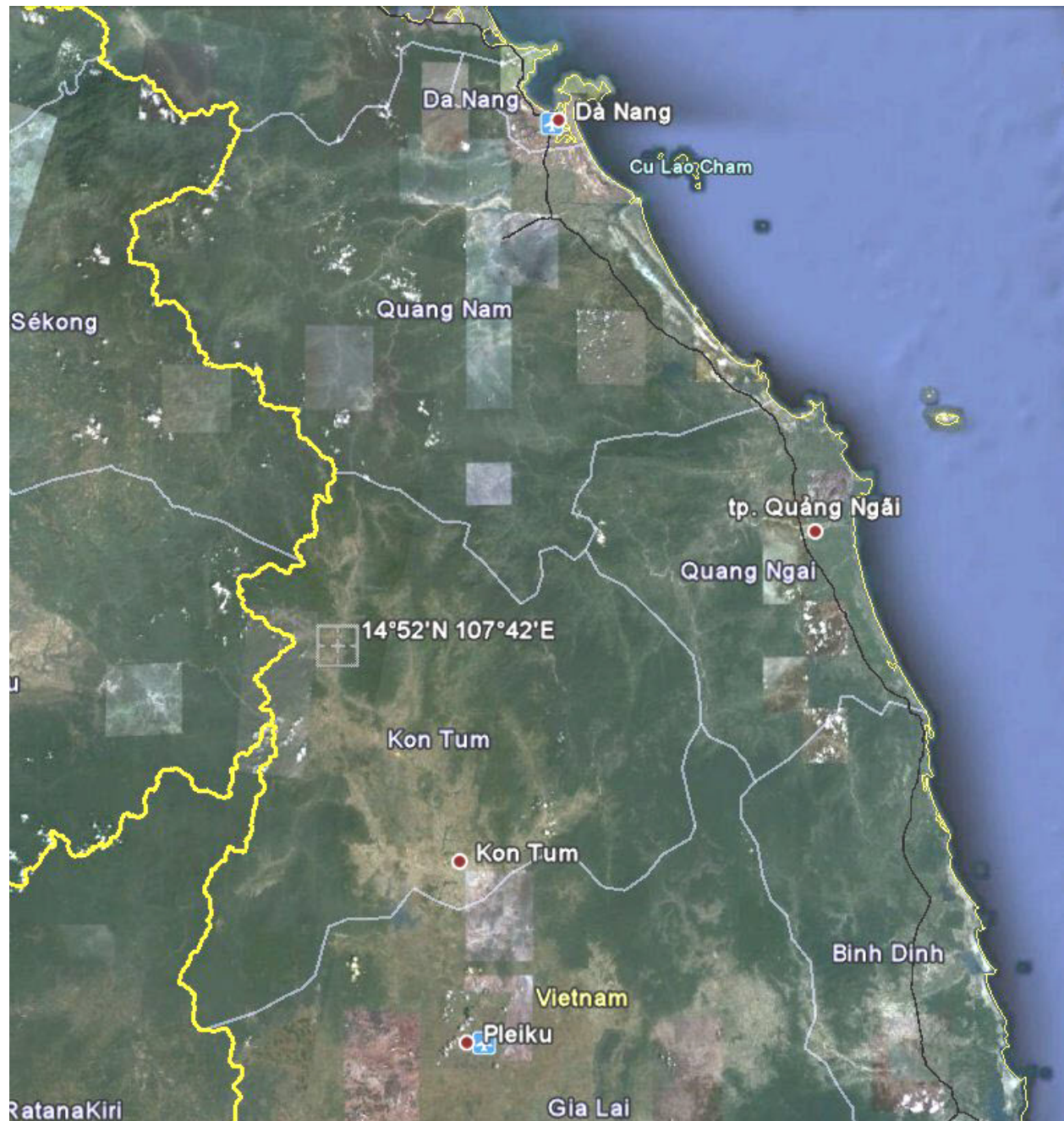
Skyraiders specifically on alert for SAR missions used the callsign Sandy. Because the A-1's at Pleiku were closer to the downed UH-1, the 6th SOS aircraft were selected to assist the SAR. These crews were also the most familiar with the area because they were based near it. Spad 3 was directed to assume on scene commander.

Enroute the Jolly crews ran combat and prepickup checklists. They also intently listened over the radio to the local area FAC who was directing fast movers into the area around the survivors. Until Spad 3 arrived the FAC's job was to keep the bad guys away from the downed aircrew.

Onboard King 6 the seven man crew began to organize the initial chaos that frequently occurred when a SAR began. Captain Adelman, the pilot, turned over routine flight management to copilot 1st Lieutenant Freiley. Captain Adelman's primary responsibility would be to act as the Airborne Mission Commander (AMC). Captain Francis, the navigator, plotted positions of the downed UH-1, the FACs and all the other aircraft supporting the mission. The radio operator (A1C Souder) was the lowest ranking member of the crew. However, he was one of the busiest men on the plane, continually radioing instructions from the AMC and NAV to the many aircraft converging on the downed UH-1. The flight engineer's (FE) job was to assist the copilot by monitoring and controlling many of the flight control systems on the HC-130 Hercules aircraft. On this flight there were two FE's (TSgt Embrey and SSgt Reaves). Usually the crew only had a single FE. Occasionally, crew members from any flight position would be receiving training or a flight check out. In those cases an instructor or flight examiner would accompany the crew for instructional or evaluation purposes. The last member of the Herk's crew was the load master SSgt Crepeau. For the duration of this SAR, these seven men would work as a team to ensure that the AMC was able to do his job and also to air refuel the Jolly's if that became needed.

King 06 radioed Spad 03 and Jolly 27 and informed them of the information he had on the SAR. Bikini 28 (UH-1) had been shot down, with 4 POB. The Army had lost 2 other helicopters in an attempt to insert an ARVN ground team to extract the survivors. Reports varied as to the number of ARVN and Americans in the area and it appeared that there were 2 or 3 Americans and an unknown number of ARVN at the crash site. Enemy forces were in the area and ground fire was being taken from 360° of the

downed Huey's location. The weather was broken clouds at 8,000', temperature 76° F and thunderstorms activity in the area. Elevation of the survivors was 2450'.



Map produced using Google Earth

King 06 then radioed the 7th AF Command Post (CP) callsign "Bluechip" and asked that two additional A-1's with smoke and two more HH-3s be launched in support of this SAR. The Rescue Coordination Center, "Joker" was collocated in the 7th AF CP so that difficulties in coordinating SARs were reduced. The present SAR had all the elements of a contested operation where the NVA/VC intended to fight to capture the crew; and in

the process, divert US and ARVN combat assets from other missions that they would have otherwise been supporting.

At 1310, Spads 3 and 4 arrived overhead the SAR objective and Spad 3 assumed on scene command. Spad 3 dropped down to a low altitude to survey the area and see if he took any ground fire. The downed UH-1 was easily seen and light ground fire came up as the A-1 passed overhead. Spad 3 had the FAC's direct additional strikes into the area the ground fire was coming from. Meanwhile Jolly Green 27 and 21 arrived and were put into a holding pattern at 7,500' just north northeast of the survivors. Spads 11 and 12 arrived next and all of the assets needed to try a pickup were on scene.

Because ground fire at the moment was minimal, it was decided to try for a fast pickup. The Spads were finishing up a double corridor smoke screen to the survivors position. The pickup Jolly would fly down the middle of the corridor and hopefully be hidden from view of the enemy. To protect the Jolly, two Army Cobra gunships would escort the Jolly and return fire as needed. By 1350, the smoke screen was finished and everyone was briefed. It was now time to make it happen.

At 1400, Jolly Green 27 dropped down to treetop level and proceeded in to attempt the rescue. He received ground fire going in and exited to the South. He departed because smoke was blocking view of the survivors and he was taking ground fire. Jolly Green 27 made a climbing left turn, reported that they had received five hits, aircraft systems were still operational and they wanted to try a second attempt to rescue the survivors. At 1403, Jolly 27 was again on the treetops heading inbound to the pickup site. Intense ground fire erupted and the crew was again forced to depart the area without the survivors. In spite of aggressive enemy resistance, the crew of Jolly 27 immediately returned to the area for a third attempt at a pickup. At 1407 the HH-3 was able to establish a momentary hover over the survivor's location before being driven off by intense ground fire. Egressing, Jolly Green 27 reported the loss of his aux-servo system. The crew of Jolly Green 21 saw flames from the engine area of Jolly Green 27 as he emerged from the smoke toward the South. The pilot of Jolly Green 27 radioed that they would have to put the helicopter down.

The high bird Jolly 21 had earlier repositioned itself to be close by in the event that low bird needed help. The crew of Jolly Green 21 watched as their teammates attempted to land. They observed wild aircraft gyrations just before Jolly Green 27 crashed, about one-half mile South-west of the location of the original survivors. The aircraft crashed in a nearly level attitude, right side up, in a flat spin to the right with little forward speed. The aircraft impacted in a gully and caught fire. Spad 3 notified King 6 that Jolly 21 was down and he would immediately commence SAR on it. King 6 requested that Joker launch another set of Jolly's. Jolly Green 22 and 07 scrambled from DaNang. Jolly 33 and 42 scrambled from NKP. Rescuemen at both the 37th ARRS DaNang and the 40th ARRS NKP wanted to aid their downed teammates and also rescue the original SAR objective Bikini 28.

At the crash site, Jolly 27's copilot (Major Wofford) exited through the shattered front Plexiglas windscreen. He then attempted to remove the aircraft commander from his seat. The copilot saw that the pilot was not conscious, slumped in the restraint harness and bleeding from all cavities of the pilot's face. Unable to free the pilot, the copilot then saw that FE (Sergeant Hartzel) and PJ (Sergeant Davis) were both on fire in the rear of the aircraft. Major Wofford ran to the cargo door where he found that Sergeant Hartzel had fallen away from the aircraft. Major Wofford pulled Sergeant Davis out of the aircraft. After they were on the ground, he started rolling the PJ and beat the fire out with his hands. Major Wofford returned to where Sergeant Hartzel was lying ablaze and put the fire out. He started pulling the FE from the immediate area when he observed that the PJ was again on fire. He ran and put the fire out on the PJ once again. Sergeant Davis was conscious and then went with Major Wofford to the unconscious FE; and together, they moved him to a safer position away from the burning aircraft.

Approximately two minutes after Jolly Green 27 crashed, Jolly Green 21 was in a hover over the wreckage. The pilot Major Garrett had told his PJ Sergeant Osborne to prepare to go down to the ground and assist survivors to be hoisted aboard. When the hover was stable, the PJ was lowered to the ground on the jungle penetrator. Once on the ground, Sergeant Osborne ran by the wreckage and he could see that the cockpit was completely engulfed by fire. He then moved the three survivors further away from the burning wreckage.

The location of the trees, the flaming wreckage and the survivors required that Jolly Green 21 hover downwind to make the pickups. Major Garrett maneuvered his helicopter out of the depression and turned 180° to downwind. Then he lowered his HH-3 into position to begin hoist operations. The fire and survivors were now on the right of the aircraft and in the view of his flight engineer (Sergeant Pope) who would run the hoist. The survivors were located approximately 10 yards from the wreckage which was now being totally consumed by flames and ammunition aboard the wreckage began cooking off.

The first survivor was hoisted aboard. Suddenly the number two engine fire warning light came on. Hover power was still good, the engine instruments were stable except that engine turbine temperature was up to 750° C, hot, but not hot enough to indicate a fire in the engine compartment. Two more survivors came up on the next hoist operation. The number one engine fire warning light came on at this time. The hoist was now lowered to pickup Sergeant Osborne. The aircraft lost power and slowly settled to the ground. Normal loss of engine power at high ambient temperature and probable engine damage due to prolonged operation in an extremely hot environment combined to cause aircraft settling as rotor rpm dropped. Technical order temperature/time limits on the engines were definitely exceeded.

On the ground, Sergeant Osborne saw that his Jolly was descending and might land on him if he did not move. He scrambled out of the way. As soon as it landed, he leaped aboard through the open crew door. The main rotor blades were just nicking a tree at the ten o'clock position. The tail rotors were also hitting foliage and sustaining minor

damage. After about 30 seconds on the ground, the rotor rpm suddenly increased enough to allow takeoff. Jolly Green 21 took off with M-60 machine guns firing to keep unfriendly heads down. The fire warning lights went out as forward speed was gained. Jolly Green 21 was over the Jolly Green 27 survivors for approximately 10 minutes total. Throughout the rescue effort an Army Cobra gunship was laying down suppressive fire 360° around the crash site. A heading to the nearest air base (Pleiku) was obtained from the Spads. Spad 03 and 04 escorted Jolly 21 to Pleiku Air Base.

Enroute, an excessive amount of torque was required to maintain a desired airspeed, substantiating that the aircraft engines had been damaged. Sergeant Osborn provided medical treatment to the two burn victims. Both Sergeants Davis and Hartzel had 2nd and 3rd degree burns over large parts of their bodies. An IV was started on one patient but the PJ was unable to get an IV started on the second.

Jolly Green 21 landed at Pleiku AB at 1600. After loading the survivors into an ambulance, the three patients were driven to the 71st Medical Evacuation Hospital on Pleiku AB. Jolly Green 21 was too damaged to fly back to DaNang. Before Jolly 21 was able to fly again, all five tail rotor blades were replaced and both engines were replaced.

Back at the crash site of Bikini 28, Spad 11 was appointed on scene commander. For the next two hours, an armada of aircraft continued to protect the downed UH-1 crew and attack enemy forces in the area. Until they could reduce enemy ground fire, it would be foolish to attempt another rescue by helicopter. A-1's and jet fighters put multiple strikes into the area but heavy ground fire continued to oppose the SAR. King 6 requested CBU 30 & 52 (tear gas

, and additional fast movers with soft ordinance and high drag bombs. During this time period Sandy 1, 2, 3 & 4, Hobo 34 & 35, King 7, and Jolly Green 22 & 07 arrived in area with Jolly Green 47 & 33 inbound. Around 1530 radio contact with Bikini 28 was lost.

Sandy 1 was appointed on scene commander at 1540 and Spad 11 & 12 returned to base. Sandy requested a radio drop be made to survivors of Bikini 28 in an attempt to reestablish radio contact. After determining that the Army, had no survival radios, King 7 was directed to drop 2 radios to a waiting helicopter at Dak To. The drop was successful and the helicopter (Bishop 13) escorted by the A-1's dropped the radio to the survivors position at 1654. King 7 then proceeded to refuel Jolly Green 47 & 33 so they would have sufficient fuel for a pick up attempt. Jolly Green 22 and 07 were directed to refuel at Dak To as a pick up attempt was not contemplated at this time.

At 1800 Spad 01 & 02 arrived and Spad 01 was appointed On-Scene Commander with Sandys RTB'd due to fuel. A further pickup attempt was called off due to deteriorating weather, and impending darkness. The ARVN and U.S. army troops were sending ground forces into the area and they would be on scene during the nighttime. King 6 released all forces at 1850. King 6 confirmed with the Army that they would extract pilot of Jolly Green 27 and rescue the crew of Bikini 28. All forces were accounted for and at 1900 King 6 terminated mission.

Back in Pleiku at the 71st Medical Evacuation Hospital, doctors were treating the survivors of Jolly Green 27. Major Travis Wofford had only minor injuries and would be released the next day. However both FE Gerald Hartzel and PJ Luther Davis were in critical condition. Initial treatment would be done at Pleiku and then they would need to be medical evacuated to facilities that could better care for them. Both were airlifted to Clark AB for stabilization. In spite of aggressive medical care, on 20 April 1970 Sergeant Gerald L. Hartzel succumbed to his injuries and passed away. Sergeant Luther E. Davis died of his injuries on 25 May 1970. The pilot of Jolly Green 27 Captain Travis H. Scott was killed in action when the helicopter crashed. His body was recovered by the U.S. Army and returned to the United States.

Captain Scott, pilot of Jolly 27 was posthumously awarded the Air Force Cross. His narrative reads:

The Air Force Cross is presented to Travis Henry Scott, Jr., Captain, U.S. Air Force, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force as an HH-53C Aircraft Commander in Southeast Asia on 15 April 1970. On that date, Captain Scott made three separate attempts to reach a crash site to rescue survivors from a downed UH-1 helicopter near Dak Nay Puey, Republic of Vietnam. On the third attempt Captain Scott's aircraft was shot down and he was killed in the crash. Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship, and aggressiveness in the face of the hostile force, Captain Scott has reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Major Travis Wofford, pilot of Jolly 21 was awarded the Air Force Cross. His narrative reads:

The Air Force Cross is presented to Travis Wofford, Major, U.S. Air Force, for extraordinary heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force as a rescue helicopter pilot near Dak Nay Puey, Republic of Vietnam, on 15 April 1970. On that date, Major Wofford was engaged in the rescue of a crew of a United States Army helicopter which was shot down by enemy ground fire. Although Major Wofford was wounded by enemy ground fire during two earlier rescue attempts, he chose to continue with the rescue operations. On the third attempt, the helicopter was severely damaged by an intense burst of heavy automatic weapons fire. When the helicopter lost power and crashed, Major Wofford, with complete disregard for his personal safety and despite his painful injuries, freed himself from the wreckage and then attempted to free the pilot, who was instantly killed on impact. He then observed the other members of the crew engulfed in flames and, with sheer determination and a deep concern for his fellow men, he rushed to their aid, extinguished the flames and then dragged the aircrew members to a place of safety from which they were rescued. Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship, and aggressiveness in the face of hostile forces, Major Wofford reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Sergeant Gary T. Osborne, PJ on Jolly 21 was awarded the Silver Star. His narrative reads:

Sergeant Gary T. Osborne distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force near Dak Nay Puey, Republic of Vietnam,

on 15 April 1970. On that date, Sergeant Osborne was a Pararescue Specialist on an HH-3E helicopter providing cover for another helicopter attempting a rescue, when the first helicopter was shot down. With complete disregard for his personal safety, Sergeant Osborne immediately descended to the rescue of the surviving crewmembers, despite exploding ammunition on the burning helicopter, and the presence of the hostile troops in the immediate rescue of three crewmembers who were burned and wounded, saving them from death or capture. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Sergeant Osborne has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

The author of this article assumes that Sergeant Gerald L. Hartzel and Sergeant Luther E. Davis also received decorations for heroism. However, no copies of these awards have been obtained by the author. If anyone has information on this, please email it to rlapointe@gci.net so that the information may be added to this story. Also, if anyone has information on the copilot and FE of Jolly 21 receiving awards for this SAR email it to the above address.

Tours of duty in Vietnam were one year long, beginning on the day you arrived and ending 365 days later. Most service men in Vietnam kept a DEROS or short timer calendar which began a reverse countdown which began 100 days from when they were scheduled to leave Vietnam. DEROS was an acronym meaning Date of Expected Return from Overseas.

