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HOTEL 71 SEARCH AND RECOVERY

(C) On 17 February 1971 at approximately 1510L an Air America H-34 helicopter crashed in Northern Laos as a result of enemy ground fire damage. All personnel were safely rescued although one individual was wounded during the effort. The aircraft made an emergency crash landing at 358/115 from Tacan Channel 108 and set down intact on the crest of a hill in thickly forested rolling terrain. Intelligence reports indicated the area was defended by many Chinese Communists and Pathet Lao with weapons ranging from small arms all the way up to 57 and 100 millimeter anti-aircraft equipment. In addition there were reports of Fan-Song and Fire-Can radars, SAM's (Surface to Air Missiles) and frequently observed Mig aircraft. ¹⁴⁵

(C) All available resources were directed to the scene although many of the aircraft were not able to fly the great distance (approximately 240 miles) in time to assist the SAR effort. The first aircraft from Nakhon Phanom RTAFB to reach the objective area were Sandy 03/04 who had been diverted from an orbit near Tacan Channel 108. They arrived at approximately 1640L and were greeted by three Air America helicopters, a Pilatus Porter, a Beech G18 and Raven 12 flying an O-1 aircraft. At this time Sandy 03 replaced Raven 12 as On-Scene Commander. ¹⁴⁶

145. SARCO Report for Hotel 71, 23 Feb 71, Document #6.

146. Ibid.

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propaganda meetings where they claimed to soon start operations to expell all Americans and all Thai traitors.¹¹²

(C) Mr. Tee, probably the best known local insurgent leader, made several appearances boasting of gains and offering advice to the terrorists. One source reported that he accompanied Mr. Tee to a jungle area known as Don Ma-1 to meet with a company of Communist forces which crossed over from Laos and included some Laotian trained Thais. On another occasion Mr. Tee met in a jungle area with a large group of Laos and Thai troops who were to be deployed to many villages. Reports soon followed that villagers saw armed insurgents in various dress and uniforms. Some of them displayed "Tor Por Tor" (The Liberation Armed Forces of Thailand) on their clothing and others wore Mao Tse Tung medals. Many spoke with a Laos dialect. The insurgent introduced one source to an expert in guerrilla warfare and two nurses and said they came from North Vietnam to train local soldiers. Mr. Tee reportedly advised the insurgents to avoid clashes with police and military authorities, it would be necessary to preserve and save strength for the present.¹¹³

(C) Probably the most significant development was the reports of financial aid. One source said that North Vietnam sent 11 million baht (\$550,000 US) to Vietnamese in Thailand for support of activities in Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, Ubon and Udorn

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

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(C) The helicopter was observed on several low passes. The door was open and the aircraft appeared to be empty. Raven 12 made several more low passes to search for survivors. On one pass he observed a crewmember come out from a group of bushes and wave his hands. This man was immediately shot and, although severely wounded, was able to crawl back to cover. On succeeding passes two more survivors were spotted and Sandy 03 decided to attempt a pick up with the resources already available.¹⁴⁷

(C) Hotel 63, an Air America H-34 helicopter which had been escorting the downed aircraft, was directed in for the pick up. He was able to rescue the wounded man and one other survivor. He immediately departed for Luang Prabang to obtain medical assistance for the seriously injured survivor. Next the fourth survivor showed himself and Sandy 03 requested one of the Air America Huey Slick helicopters to pick up the remaining men. He agreed and at 1737L all four personnel had been rescued.¹⁴⁸

(C) This Search and Recovery was severely handicapped because the downed crewmembers had no survival radios or any means of electronic communications. Fortunately the recovery forces were unopposed and the incident occurred in an area where the survivors could be spotted and observed visually. In addition the SAR forces had been briefed that only three persons were on board the downed helicopter. The fourth person could have been neglected if the aircraft had crashed in a hostile environment or in an

147. Ibid.

148. Ibid.

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area concealed by jungle canopy.¹⁴⁹

(C) At 1940L the SAR was terminated. Jolly Green 61 was diverted to Luang Prabang to Med-Evac the wounded survivor. Sandy 03/04 and Raven 12 remained to expend their ordnance on the source of ground fire which originally damaged the helicopter and all other forces returned to their home stations.¹⁵⁰

149. Ibid.

150. Ibid.

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FROM: 1st SOS (CC)

23 Feb 71

SUBJECT: SARCO Report for Hotel 71

TO: DO

1. A successful rescue was conducted on 17 Feb 71 for Hotel 71. The aircraft, an Air America H34 Helicopter, went down at approximately 1510 local, 17 Feb 71, 115NM North of Lima Site 98. This report covers those activities relating to the Sandys during the rescue effort.
2. Sandys 03, 04, 05 and 06 had launched on their scheduled times for the "I" and "J" orbits. 03 and 04 were 35NM SE of LS 98 when notified by King of the downed aircraft. Hotel 71 had been downed by enemy gunfire.
3. Other forces scrambled/diverted were Sandys 05 and 06 from "J" orbit Sandys 09 and 10 returning from Da Nang; Hobos 20 and 21, Prairie Fire assets scrambled in support of SAR; Nail 14 diverted in-flight; and Jolly Greens 54 and 61, scrambled from NKP, and 62 and 65 scrambled from Ubon. Launch and enroute times shown in attachment 1. In addition there were 3 Air America helicopters, a porter, a Beech G18 and a Raven 12 on-scene.
4. Hotel 71 had set down intact on the crest of a hill in thickly forested rolling terrain. The weather was clear with visibility 6+. A paved highway was clearly visible a short distance to the northwest. Defenses in that area were briefed as many CHIGM and Pathet Lao, small arms, automatic weapons, 12.7mm, 14.5mm, 23mm, 57mm, 100mm, Pan-Song and Fire-Can Radars, SAM's and MIG threat. In addition there were Chinese Engineer battalions working on the road.
5. Sandys 03 and 04 arrived on-scene at approximately 1640 local. After receiving a briefing from Raven 12 Sandy 03 assumed on-scene command. The Raven and the Sandys made several low passes examining the helicopter and looking for survivors. On one of the passes one survivor showed himself but was promptly wounded. Two other survivors were then sighted. The Sandys then laid down CBU-25, 20mm and 7.62mm in preparation for a pickup attempt. Hotel 63 was directed in and picked up 2 of the survivors including the wounded man. This aircraft then departed immediately for Luang Prabang for medical assistance. One of the remaining helicopters, 96W, then proceeded in and picked up the remaining 2 survivors. It was later reported that the helicopters received "massive ground-fire" during the efforts. (See Atch 2) As 96W departed the area the Sandys expended the remainder of their ordnance in the area. At 1742 all forces were directed to RTB with one exception. Jolly Green 61 was directed to LS 54 for possible Medevac of the wounded survivor. (See Atch 3) At 1940 local the SAR was terminated by Jack.

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6. It was confirmed twice that there were only 3 persons on board the downed aircraft. Had not the fourth one been observed we could have quite possibly left someone out there. The location and distance of the crash site proved to be a major problem area in that, the majority of the SAR forces never arrived. The lack of radio communications with the survivors could have been disastrous. Recommend the importance of the use of emergency survival radios be restressed to all aircrews operating in Theater.


WILLIAM J. HAGAN
Lt Colonel USAF
SARCO

3 Atch

1. Flying Schedule
2. SARCO Log
3. Statement for
Sandy 03/04

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FLYING SCHEDULE

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Pilot	Call Sign	T/O	ATE	Remarks
Capt Keeter	Sandy 03	1440	4.7	On Scene Commander
Maj De Felice	04	1440	5.0	
Maj Bishop	05	1435	4.1	
Colonel Walsh	06	1435	4.3	
Lt Colonel Dunwoody	09	1600	3.0	From Da Nang
1LT Roussel	10	1600	3.0	From Da Nang
1LT Paine	Hobo 20	1633	2.7	
Capt Stewart	21	1633	2.7	

Atch 1

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SARCO LOG - 17 Feb 1971

1545L - Lt Colonel Wells from Jack called to say: (1) Sandys 03 & 04, and 05 & 06 had been directed to the crash site. (2) Jolly Greens 54 & 61 were directed to scramble from NKP. (3) NKP was to generate 4 Smoke aircraft. (4) The downed aircraft was an Air America H34, callsign H-71. Location 340/94/108. Coordinates TH2982.

1552L - Sarco advised Jack that we only had one in-commission A-1 for Smoke request. (Acft 215). Also advised Jack of 2 Prairie Fire assets, Hobos 20/21 that they might try to get released to SAR. Also requested MIGCAP and IRONHAND at that time.

1556L - Intelligence advises not to go too far Northwest of reported location due to heavy AAA with Firecan/Fansong radars. Passed to Jack.

1600L - Jolly Greens 54/61 airborne.

1606L - Fowler Flight, 2F4E's enroute. On scene Forces have no contact with survivors but downed helicopter visually checked intact and O.K.

1615L - Prairie Fire, Hobos 20/21, released and scrambled to SAR. Site location 342° for 42 minutes from 108.

1617L - Jack advised 360/60/108 will be holding point for Jollies. Nail 19 arrived on scene. New location of site now 350/115/108.

1620L - Upon Jolly Greens scrambled by King Jolly Greens 62/65.

1625L - King 25 scrambled.

1635L - Two T-28's with Strike ordnance enroute. New position - 016° for 10 clics from site at TJ 4716.

1639L - Sandys 03/04 on-scene. Hotel 73 over site and has visual on 3 survivors.

1645L - Sandys 09/10 estimating on scene 1815L with Bingo of 1930L. Jolly Green 65 estimating Pakse 1800L with Bingo of 1930L. Raven 12 On-Scene-Commander. Sandys 03/04 Bingo 2000L.

1715L - Sandy 03 On-Scene-Commander. Sandys striking around area of survivors.

1720L - One survivor spotted. Has been shot. May be O.K. Second survivor spotted.

1725L - Aircraft H-63 will attempt Phase "B" on 2 survivors.

1731L - One badly wounded survivor picked up. Another picked up. Hotel 63 going to LS54 due to low fuel.

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SARCO LOG - 17 Feb 1971 (CONT'D)

1735L - Third survivor sighted and Phase B being attempted. One Jolly Green going to LS54 for possible MedEvac.

1737L - Picked up two survivors, one indigenous. Aircraft 96W made pickup.

1742L - Jack directs - (1) All Sandies RTB channel 89. (2) All Jollys RTB channel 70 except 61 going to LS54 for MedEvac. (3) Several helicopters reported receiving "massive ground fire".

1940L - SAR terminated.

Atch 2

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STATEMENT

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SAR FOR HOTEL 71

Hotel 71 (an H34 chopper) went down on the 358° radial for 115M off CH100 at approximately 1510 local, 17 Feb 71. We (Sandy 03 & 04/Keeper and De Felice) were enroute to T-Orbit and were approximately 120°/35/108 when the chopper went down. As soon as King 22 established the chopper's location, we proceeded north and arrived on-scene at 1640 local. There was at least 20 minutes lost after the Mayday call (incidentally, this call was made by Hotel 63, the wingman) before King established any fix on their position. This explains our delay in arriving on-scene. King 22 was very busy throughout the drive up to the area in assembling numerous fast movers to act as strike birds, coordinating with Brigham for tanker support, etc. We received no briefings from King 22 at any time as to what type of aircraft were on-scene, who was in command, or what type of resistance the SAR was meeting. We got the information we needed, but had to pick it out piece by piece.

Arrived on-scene around 1640 local and observed numerous aircraft circling the crash site, which was on the crest of a North/South ridge-line about 1 mile South of a river. I observed Raven 12 (0-1), Hotel 63 (H34), 2 Huey Slicks (Air America), a Pilatus Porter, and a Beach GL8 (Air America). Raven 12 was on-scene commander. Everyone was talking at once on Air America Common, 119.1. After sometime I was able to get everyone up 123.1 so that King could listen to the events and I then assumed on-scene command. We were also using 259.0 for a common UHF and all the fast movers were available on it. The survivors had no radios.

Raven 12 showed me the crash site. We (Raven 12, and Sandies 3 & 4) made numerous low passes over the crash and determined the choppers door to be open and the chopper empty. On one of the low passes Raven 12 observed one survivor (wearing a grey shirt) come out of a small bush and start waving his hands. The Sandies then held high to protect Raven 12 who went low in an attempt to find the other three. It was on this pass that Raven 12 called "He has been hit"; "They have shot him", referring to the first survivor that showed himself to us. The next pass indicated the man to be wounded but still able to crawl for cover. About this time, two of the remaining survivors showed themselves and we immediately decided to send Hotel 63 (the other H34) in for pickup. He picked up two of them, one of whom was the wounded survivor. After Hotel 63 vacated the area for Luang Parabang and medical attention, the fourth survivor showed himself to Raven 12 and we immediately asked one of the Air America Huey Slicks (Call sign was Tango Foxtrot, I believe) to make an attempt at pickup. He agreed and picked up both remaining survivors.

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STATEMENT

SAR FOR HOTEL 71 (CONT'D)

No ground fire was observed during any of the pickups. Prior to the pickups we put down light ordnance around the crash site as a deterrent. We used CBU-25 in the valleys on either side of the North/South Ridgeline and 20mm and 7.62 Minigun to the North and South of the crash. After everyone left the area, we put down the rest of the ordnance on board in areas where the FAC, Raven 12, thought the ground fire had come that downed the chopper. The Sandies then RTB'd at 1745 local.


JACK E. KEETER, Capt, USAF
SANDY 03

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