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KNIFE 34 SEARCH AND RECOVERY

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(C) Quick reaction by the crew of Knife 33 resulted in the immediate rescue of the crew and passengers of Knife 34 when it crashed on a combat mission 18 February 1971. The two CH-53 helicopters were being escorted by two A-1 aircraft, Hobo 22/23. Knife 33 had completed off-loading its passengers and was waiting for Knife 34 which developed engine problems, possibly as a result of enemy ground fire. At 1105L Hobo 22 saw the helicopter suddenly go out of control and crash into the HLZ (Helicopter Landing Zone). There were no fires or explosions associated with the crash.

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(C) Hobo 22 immediately assumed On-Scene Command and other SAR forces were alerted. Sandy 01/02 were flying a special orbit near the objective area and were diverted to the scene. All other forces remained on alert for immediate launch.

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(C) Knife 33 had been hovering approximately two miles from the scene of the crash and immediately drove in and used a jungle penetrator to pick up the crewmembers and passengers. The helicopter was down in hilly terrain with tall trees and weather was not a factor. All the survivors were picked up approximately 20 minutes after the crash and the SAR was terminated at 1128L. Knife 33 recovered at Ubon RTAFB and the other forces returned to Nakhon Phanom RTAFB. No enemy resistance was reported during the rescue effort although Knife 34 reported ground fire during their initial penetration.

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151. SARCO Report for Knife 34, 23 Feb 71, Document #5.
152. Ibid.
153. Ibid.

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were 11 total CH-3's authorized and assigned during the period.

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(S) The CH-3 helicopters continued to be used largely for support missions and training sorties. One of its major functions was to perform night reconnaissance in the areas adjacent to the Base. This mission was known as Knife 47 and reported increasing numbers of apparent overt operations by unknown armed men clad in black pajamas. On one occasion Knife 47 aided in a rescue by picking up a crewmember who had bailed out of an AC-119 Gunship.* The better performing and larger CH-53 was used more in the X-Ray and Prairie Fire tactical combat mission role.

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Prairie Fire:

(S) The Prairie Fire mission, which primarily involved infiltration/exfiltration of Study and Observation Groups (SOG), continued to be extremely hazardous. One CH-53 was lost to enemy ground fire while attempting to hover over a particularly dangerous HLZ (Helicopter Landing Zone) on 10 February 1971. During that month there were a total of four Prairie Fire missions and all were subjected to enemy resistance. In March there were five infiltration missions and three of them turned into emergency exfiltrations as a result of intense enemy ground fire and large numbers of enemy personnel in the area. The mission was flown to support the Army and HLZ's were selected deep in enemy controlled areas and often

179. 21st SOS Historical Data Records, Jan-Mar 71, Tab B, Appendix V, and 56th SPOFWG Monthly Maintenance Summary, Jan-Mar 71, Document #15.

* See Volume I, Chapter III, Search and Recovery for more information.

180. 21st SOS Historical Data Records, Jan-Mar 71, Tab B, Appendix V.

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where helicopter operations could easily be observed by the enemy.

Such actions appeared unwise because first, they subjected the aircraft and team to extreme hazards, and secondly, because many of the missions failed to accomplish their assigned task when the team had to be lifted out immediately after being infiltrated. The more successful Prairie Fire missions used HLZ's located on high terrain (4,000 to 6,000 feet). These altitudes were out of the efficient operating range for the smaller CH-3 but the CH-53's were well suited for the operations. ¹⁸¹

X-Ray:

(S) The 21st Special Operations Squadron was very active in the X-Ray mission during the quarter. Larger and larger operations were encountered and the unit referred to them as "Mass Gaggles". One such operation was the largest mission ever launched by the Knife Squadron at Nakhon Phanom RTAFBB and included 16 of the total 20 aircraft available. That day 1,555 troops and 9,300 pounds of cargo were moved and the aircraft were greeted by rockets in the landing zone area. Fortunately the rockets were unguided, inaccurate, and no helicopters were damaged. Another Mass Gaggle used six CH-53's and six CH-3's to move 1,100 troops and their support cargo in less than four hours. The mission terminated with an impressive 12 ship flyby at home station. ¹⁸²

181. Ibid.

182. Ibid.

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FRANCIS (Lt Col) Dunwoody/2754)

23 February 1971

SUBJECT: SARCO REPORT FOR KNIFE 34

TO: DO

1. A successful rescue was conducted on 18 February 1971, for Knife 34. The aircraft, a CH-53, went down 0405Z/ 18 Feb 1971 at approximately 2 miles south of D-44. This report covers those activities relating to the Sandys/Hobos during the rescue effort.
2. Knife 33 and 34 launched at 0235Z with Hobo's 22 and 23 as escort on a fragged infill mission. The mission went as briefed with Knife 33 accomplishing the first infill. At 0405Z Hobo 22 and 23 were covering the infill for Knife 34 on his HLZ. Hobo 22 stated, "suddenly I saw knife 34 go out of control and crash on the HLZ". Knife 33, holding 2 miles from the crash site, now headed directly to the scene. Hobo 22 notified King 24 and gave the location of crash and requested the SAR forces be alerted. Due to the nature of the terrain on the HLZ, Knife 33 used his penetrator to pickup the survivors. In approximately 10 to 15 minutes all survivors were on board with 3 survivors injured. Hobo 22 flight escorted Knife 33 to Ubon for a successful recovery. The Hobo flight then returned to NKP.
3. All SAR forces were alerted by 0410Z. Sandy 01 and 02 were flying a special orbit near the "Rooster Tail" and diverted to the scene. The SARCO briefed Sandys 03 and 04 and told to maintain ground alert until needed. Sandy's 05 and 06 at UBON were also briefed for a possible launch. All fragged A-1 missions at NKP were put on a temporary hold and Blue Chip was requested to release Hobo 20 flight for smoke loads. At 0426Z knife 33 made his pickup and the SAR terminated at 0428Z. Sandy 01 and 02 never reached the scene and returned to their orbit. All missions at NKP went back to normal operations.
4. Weather was no factor in the HLZ areas. The terrain was hilly with tall trees in the HLZ area. Hobo 22 and 23 never observed enemy ground fire at any time. Knife 34 crew later debriefed that ground fire was heard during their infill.
5. No problems or difficulties were experienced in the SAR effort. Hobo 22 recommended that all Nails/Misty/Jets/ etc. be rebriefed on the importance of staying clear of the HLZ and particularly when a SAR is in progress.

Richard H. Dunwoody

RICHARD H. DUNWOODY, Lt Colonel, USAF
SARCO

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SAR FORCES

HOB0 22	Captain James Madden	ON SCENE COMMANDER
HOB0 23	Captain Roy Hamiya	
HAIL 53	Lt Ted Stuckley	
KING 24		
KNIFE33	Maj J. Adkins	
SANDY 01	Lt Alan Young	
SANDY 02	Lt Ralph Anderson	

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