

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF

THE SILVER STAR

TO

MICHAEL A. CURTIS

Airman First Class Michael A. Curtis distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force near Kh. Sanh, Republic of Vietnam, on 26 February 1971. On that date, as a Pararescue Specialist on an HH-53 Rescue Helicopter, Airman Curtis' efforts culminated in the rescue of two United States Air Force aircrewmembers from certain death or capture by hostile armed forces. With full knowledge of the extent of hostile fire in the area and complete disregard for his own personal safety, and despite the helicopter's receiving numerous hits by ground fire, Airman Curtis exposed himself to the hostile fire throughout the rescue effort to provide suppressive fire, preventing much greater damage to the helicopter, and insuring the safe rescue of the downed airmen. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Airman Curtis has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

37 ARRSQ HISTORY, 1 JULY - 30 SEPTEMBER 1971

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT #6

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EUGENE L. NARDI

Technical Sergeant Eugene L. Nardi distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force near Khe Sanh, Republic of Vietnam, on 26 February 1971. On that date, as a Pararescue Technician on an HH-53 Rescue Helicopter, Sergeant Nardi's efforts culminated in the rescue of two United States Air Force aircrewmembers from certain death or capture by hostile armed forces. With full knowledge of the extent of hostile fire in the area and complete disregard for his own personal safety, and despite the helicopter's receiving numerous hits by ground fire, Sergeant Nardi exposed himself to the hostile fire throughout the rescue effort to provide suppressive fire, preventing much greater damage to the helicopter, and insuring the safe rescue of the downed airmen. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Sergeant Nardi has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

37 ARPSO HISTOET, 1 JULY - 30 SEPTEMBER 1971

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT #5

25 February 1971

F-4D 65-0637 12 TFW, USAF, Phu Cat
Capt Hedditch (survived)
1Lt T McLaughlin (survived)

The second Phantom lost on this day was taking part in a night mission in the same area. Capt Hedditch was making his third pass on a target near Ban Tampanko when his aircraft was struck by ground fire. In this instance both the crew ejected successfully and were rescued by a USAF helicopter.

Gunfighter
Gazette

Volume VI, No. 34

August 28, 1971

5 'Jollys' Earn Medals



Recipients of the Silver Star Medal, from left, A1C Steve Rhody, Capt. John R. Weimer, TSgt. Eugene Nardi, and TSgt. Carlos J. McKinney II, pose in front of an HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter. The medals were presented recently by Gen. Jack J. Catton, commander of Military Airlift Command. Missing from photo is A1C Michael Curtis, recipient of two medals, who has returned to the United States. (U.S. Air Force Photo)

Six Silver Star Medals were presented to five members of the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron here recently, in recognition of their "gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force."

The five are: Capt. John R. Weimer Jr., an HH-53 "Super Jolly Green Giant" helicopter aircraft commander; TSgt. Carlos J. McKinney II, flight engineer; TSgt. Eugene L. Nardi, A1C Michael Curtis and A1C Steve Rhody, pararescuemen.

Presenting the medals at the ceremony was Gen. Jack J. Catton, commander of Military Airlift Command, of which the 37th ARRS is a subordinate unit.

Captain Weimer, Sergeant McKinney, Sergeant Nardi and Airman Curtis were crew members on the same "Super Jolly Green Giant" when, on February 26, near Khe Sanh, Republic of Vietnam, their efforts culminated in the rescue of two U.S. Air Force aircrewmembers from "certain death or

(See Story Page 2)

General Catton presents six Silver Stars to Jolly Greens

Silver Stars Presented

(Continued from Page 1)

capture by hostile armed forces," according to citations read at the ceremony.

The citations further stated, "all crew members exposed themselves to hostile fire throughout the rescue effort, "with

full knowledge of the extent of hostile fire in the area and complete disregard for (their) personal safety, and despite the helicopter's receiving numerous hits by ground fire."

Airman Curtis was doubly honored during the ceremony, receiving two Silver Stars. The second was in recognition of his performance on Mar. 13, near Tchepone, Laos, when he and Airman Rhody were again involved in a rescue attempt.

Airman Rhody exposed himself to ground fire on the rescue hoist twice outside a door of the helicopter while descending to help a wounded survivor on the ground until withering ground fire crippled the helicopter and wounded two crewmembers, (Airman Curtis was one of these) making continued rescue efforts impossible.

Airman Curtis manned his gun position continuing to expose himself to ground fire after being wounded, until the helicopter safely departed the scene.

Captain Weimer, 30, a native of San Bernardino, Calif., is a graduate of Springfield Senior High, Akron, Ohio. He has since attended Ohio University in Athens, and Central Michigan University at Wurtlandth AFB, Mich. He was commissioned in the Air Force in 1962 under the Aviation Cadet program.

He is married to the former Edith R. McClellan of West Blockton, Ala. The couple has three children: Donna, 6; Gloria, 6 and Gary, 5.

A native of Mirimar, Fla., Sergeant Nardi, 33, has attended Bethel Park High School, Bethel Park, Pa., and Broward County Junior College, Fla.

The 12-year Air Force veteran has served 32 months in the Republic of Vietnam as a pararescueman. He was formerly assigned to the 39th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Wing at Richards-Gebaur AFB, Mo.

Sergeant McKinney is from New Braunfels, Tex. He is married to the former Cynthia F. Jung, also from New Braunfels. They have one child, Michael, 11.

Airman Curtis has returned to the United States, having completed his tour in the Republic. He graduated from Boston English High School, Boston, in 1969.

Airman Rhody has attended Radford High School, Hawaii, and the University of Hawaii.

He was assigned at Eglin AFB, Fla., prior to coming to Da Nang.

PACIFIC STAR AND STRIPES

AN AUTHORIZED UNOFFICIAL PUBLICATION
FOR THE U.S. ARMED FORCES OF THE PACIFIC COMMAND

Vol. 27, No. 58

Sunday, Feb. 20, 1971

2 Rescued Pilots Describe Ordeal in Laos

DA NANG, Vietnam (AP) — Two U.S. fighter pilots described Friday night how they huddled on a Laotian hillside for nearly 23 hours while North Vietnamese troops who shot them down overran a South Vietnamese fire base a half mile away.

Their F4 Phantom fighter-bomber exploded in flames Thursday while dropping napalm on enemy tanks and gun emplacements attacking Hill 31, a South Vietnamese airborne battalion fire base eight miles inside Laos.

The two crewmen ejected and used their emergency radios to direct air strikes on the attacking force while North Vietnamese soldiers searched for them in the bushes.

Talking with news men at an officers' club in Da Nang several hours after their rescue, Capt. David R. Hedditch, 28, Hamilton, Mont., and Lt. Thomas M. McLaughlin, 24, Melrose, Mass., both said "we thought we were dead men" when North Vietnamese searchers came within 10 feet of their separate hiding places.

"We were called out in a mission over Laos Thursday afternoon, refuel in the air over Thailand and returned to Laos when the forward air controller — FAC — told us to stand by for a strike on Hill 31," said Hedditch, the aircraft commander.

"I made my first napalm pass to mark the target, my wingman made corrections and I made a second napalm strike. As I was pulling out, the bird went out of control, pitched upward and then the whole cockpit turned red. I knew we had been

hit and were on fire, but I don't know what hit us."

McLaughlin, his backseater, ejected first. They parachuted 2,000 feet and landed on a hillside near the fire base.

Faces smeared with mud for camouflage, the men remained separated for the next 22½ hours until their rescue by a Jolly Green Giant helicopter Friday afternoon.

"All I could find was some knee high grass to hide in," said Hedditch. "I heard some noise, shut off my radio and just froze. Then I saw two North Viet-

namese soldiers walking around looking for me.

"After that I talked with an FAC and he assured us we would get as much air cover as they could lay on. Tom was also on the radio, so I knew he was all right, but we didn't dare move toward each other."

McLaughlin said he landed about 20 yards from an enemy mortar.

"I could hear the gun crew talking in between rounds as they fired at the fire base," he said. "Both of us heard tanks, continuous small-arms fire and a 37mm antiaircraft gun working on the choppers overhead. There was a hell of a lot of firing out there."

Rescue helicopters were repeatedly driven off by intense enemy fire, and as dusk fell Thursday night the forward air controller hovering overhead told them they would have to spend the night in Laos.

"Right then I figured we were dead," Hedditch said. "It started raining, freezing rain, and it continued through the night. I was stiff and sore from lying in the same position all the time."

At first light Friday, fighter-bombers joined the protective air pattern, flying 75 sorties continuously for eight hours to keep the North Vietnamese away from their downed buddies.

"The FAC decided to try another pickup at 1315 (1:15 p.m.)," said Hedditch. "He put a smoke flare right by me to mark the position. It scared the hell out of me. He told me to pop a smoke when the Jolly Green came in, and I threw it away from me down the hillside, so the NVA wouldn't open up on my position. I knew they were watching."

"The chopper hovered about 20 feet away and I scampered toward it. I really expected to be shot, but we didn't take any fire. I just grabbed that sling and prayed as they hoisted me up. The guys were too busy to say a word to me as I came in."

"As soon as I climbed in, I went to the back of the chopper with my .45, hoping to see some bad guys while we headed to pick up Tom."

When the helicopter dropped down again to pick up McLaughlin, it came under withering fire, taking 13 direct hits.

"Those 15 to 25 seconds were an eternity as they pulled me up on the sling," said McLaughlin. "It's an experience I never want to face again."

Hedditch continued: "When I saw Tom come in, I just crawled over and embraced him. I can't even remember what we said because of the rotor noise."

"We just held on to each other, we were so damn glad to see each other. Then we sat back and counted the bullet holes."

37th Rescues 2-Laos

After what was possibly the longest 22 hours of their lives, two USAF jet fighter pilots were pulled out of heavily enemy-infested territory recently, by crews from the 37th ARRS.

Capt. David R. Hedditch and 1st Lt. Thomas M. McLaughlin, both F-4 Phantom pilots from Phu Cat AB, punched out of their aircraft after it was shot down by enemy fire near the Laotian city of Tchepone.

That event started a chain-reaction which was to become one of the most heavily contested search and rescue (SAR) missions in the history of the war.

With the enemy sometimes within 20 meters of his position, Captain Hedditch managed to lay low and evade his would-be captors while A-1E Skyraiders and jet

fighters pounded the area to silence the enemy ground fire so that rescue choppers could get in.

Lieutenant McLaughlin, who was approximately a half-mile away from his fellow pilot, said that the enemy was so close to his position that at one time while hiding in a bush; "I was practically looking at two of them face-to-face. I reached for my weapon and then froze in my position. Amazingly they didn't spot me and about five minutes later they started moving down the hill. I didn't know whether I was going to have to shoot it out with them or what."

Aided by A-1 Skyraiders and jet fighters, the "Buffs" stood a steady vigilance over the area while attempts were made to silence the enemy guns.

Around noon of the second day, the area had been saturated enough for the rescue chopper to come in and pick up the downed men.

The crew of the rescue chopper were, Capt. Karlton I. Bakke, aircraft commander; Capt. John R. Weimer, Jr., the co-pilot; TSgt. Carlos J. McKinney, the flight engineer; and TSgt. Eugene L. Nardi and A1C Michael A. Curtis, the PJ's (pararescuemen).

Destroy Red Tank

Phantoms Aid Downed Pilots

DA NANG AFLD, Vietnam (Special) — The skill of two Air Force F4 Phantom fighter-bomber crews from the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing here made the jungle cover useless to an enemy tank that was attempting to foil a search and rescue operation.

A pilot of one of the Phantoms, 1st Lt. John O. Labouliere, commented on the unusual action: "We were flying to a combat support mission in an area in Laos where ARVN ground troops were engaged in Operation Lam Son 719. As we approached the area, we heard another F4 crewman already over the target saying, 'Lead, lead, you're on fire!'"

"There was a slight pause and then we heard the forward air controller (FAC) say, 'I see one chute. . . . I see the other one.'"

The Phantoms immediately diverted to the area. "When a search and rescue (SAR) is in progress, nearly everything else is dropped," explained the lieutenant. "The SAR is of the utmost importance."

"There was intense ground fire, and while we were working the area, the FAC was trying to get the location of the two downed pilots."

"The FAC saw two tanks coming up a road in the area. At first, we had a hard time spotting them because of the haze in the area. Also, there were numerous helicopters in the area and we had to watch out for them."

"The tanks started up the hill to where the two parachutes had been spotted, so we made a pass, and the lead aircraft opened up on them with 20mm cannons."

"The lead aircraft then came in again on a bomb pass. We fol-

lowed them in and dropped our ordnance. The FAC then told us to go up high while he checked on the position of the two pilots," recalled Labouliere.

"At this time we were low on fuel and had to return to base," he added. The Phantoms left the area but other aircraft were soon on the scene.

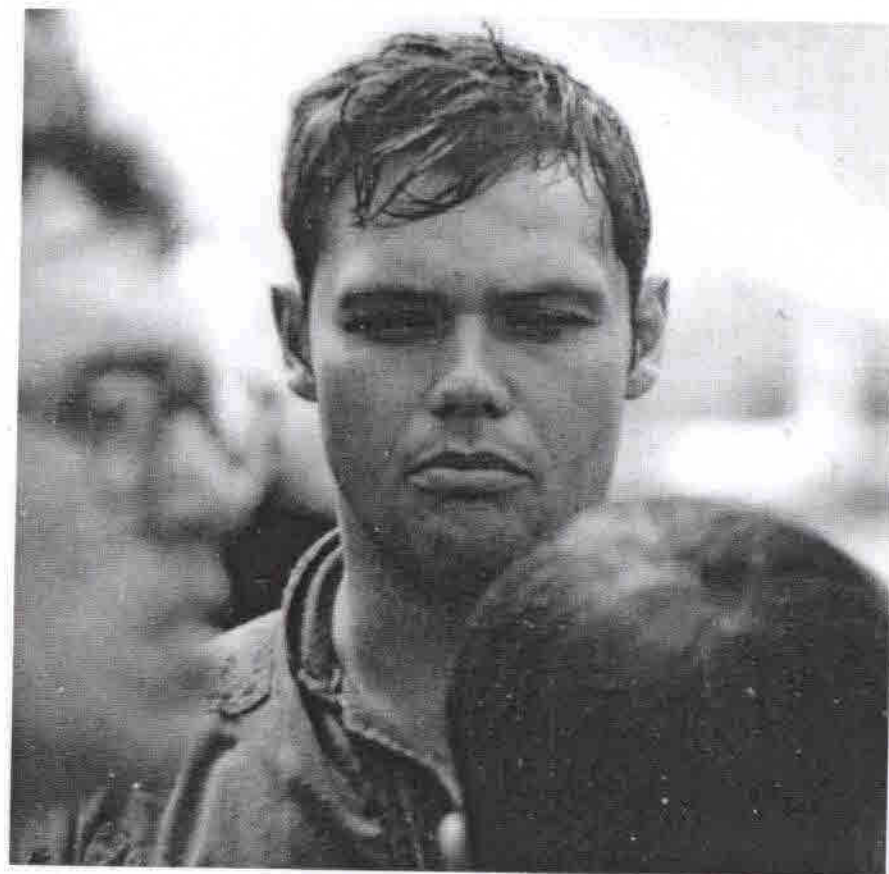
When the crewmembers returned to Da Nang, they learned that they had been credited with destroying one of the tanks. The next day, after one of the most intense SAR missions in recent months, the two downed pilots were picked up by rescue crews from the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron from Da Nang.

When he learned that the pilots had been rescued after 22 hours on the ground, Labouliere commented, "I was really glad when I heard that they finally got them out — it must have been hell down there."



SAVE 607 CAPT DAVID HEDDICH, 1000

Heddich&McLaughlin.jpg



SAVE 608 1/LT THOMAS A. LA WHITE

26 FEB 71



WEIMER

SURVIVOR

UnknownSaves.jpg
AF Museum Photo

SURVIVOR

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CARLOS
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26 FEB 71 SAR

DANANG 1971

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STEVE RHODY

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PILOT
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BAHKE, CARLTON

CO-PILOT

CAPT

JOHN WEIMER

SURVIVOR

CAPT DAVID HEDORICH

1LT THOMAS MCLAUGHLIN



COBRA 23 SAR

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NARDI HAS ORIGINAL

CURTIS BAKKE WEINER MCKINNEY

HEDDORICH + McLAUGHLIN SURVIVORS F4

Downed pilots spend 'longest 22 hours'

DA NANG AFLD — After what was possibly the longest 22 hours of their lives, two jet fighter pilots were pulled out of heavily infested enemy territory recently by rescue crews of the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron.

Capt. David R. Hedditch and 1st Lt. Thomas M. McLaughlin, F-4 Phantom crew members at Phu Cat AB, bailed out of their aircraft after it was hit by enemy fire near the Laotian city of Tchepone. That event started a chain reaction which was to become one of the most heavily contested search and rescue efforts in SEA during recent months.

With the enemy sometimes within 20 meters of his position, Captain Hedditch managed to lay low and evade his would-be captors while A-1 Sky-raidors and jet fighters pounded the area to silence the enemy ground fire so that rescue choppers could get in.

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time while hiding in a bush he was "practically looking at two of them face-to-face." I reached for my weapon and then froze in my position. Amazingly they didn't spot me and about five minutes later they started moving on down the hill.

Hindered by heavy enemy ground fire and poor weather conditions, the rescue efforts were unsuccessful the

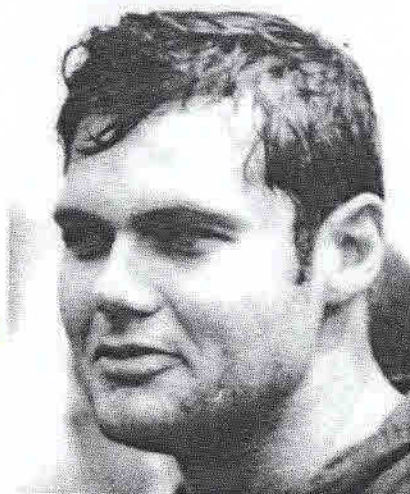
first day. But with the first light of the new day the rescue aircraft were once again airborne and headed for the area.

"Around noon the area had been saturated enough for us to come in," recalled Capt. John R. Weimer Jr., HH-53 co-pilot. "We were still receiving ground fire, but once we found the survivors, the ground fire was not so intense that we could not stay there."

Said Capt. Carlton I. Bakke, rescue helicopter commander, "We came in at treetop level and picked up this aircraft commander (Captain Hedditch) first. We saw his smoke marker and spotted him right away and had him pulled up within two or three minutes.

"We then had to go over a little ridge to get the back seater. We aimed for his smoke and again we were about two or three minutes in a hover. Just as he was coming in the door we started receiving more ground fire and more hits. We got out low and fast and we received more ground fire."

Lieutenant McLaughlin recalled that when he saw the rescue chopper coming in, "I left everything I had sitting there and scrambled through the



U.S. Air Force Photos by
TSgt. Robert Minsky

Lieutenant McLaughlin

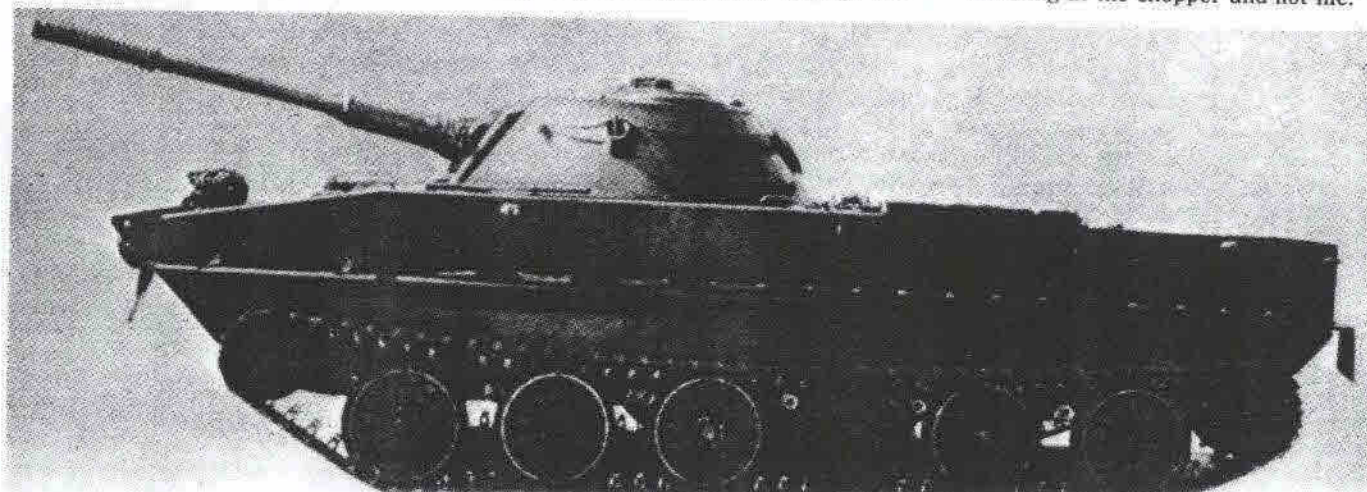
trees, falling down and tripping in the elephant grass, trying to get to that penetrator which hit the ground about the time I got to it.

"Once I got on the penetrator, it seemed like forever before I got in the aircraft, with all the firing going on around me. But I guess they were shooting at the chopper and not me."

Investigations bust 'H' ring, net 42 men

HQ. 7AF — Forty-two enlisted airmen have been apprehended in connection with narcotics charges at Cam Ranh Bay AB.

After a month-long investigation into a narcotics ring at the base, the airmen were being held for question-



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The two crewmen ejected and used their emergency radios to direct air strikes on the attacking force while North Vietnamese soldiers searched for them in the bushes.

Talking with news men at an officers' club in Da Nang several hours after their rescue, Capt. David R. Hedditch, 28, Hamilton, Mont., and Lt. Thomas M. McLaughlin, 24, Melrose, Mass., both said "we thought we were dead men" when North Vietnamese searchers came within 10 feet of their separate hiding places.

"We were called out in a mission over Laos Thursday afternoon, refuel in the air over Thailand and returned to Laos when the forward air controller — FAC — told us to stand by for a strike on Hill 31," said Hedditch, the aircraft commander.

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hit and were on fire, but I don't know what hit us."

McLaughlin, his backseater, ejected first. They parachuted 2,000 feet and landed on a hillside near the fire base.

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namese soldiers walking around looking for me.

"After that I talked with an FAC and he assured us we would get as much air cover as they could lay on. Tom was also on the radio, so I knew he was all right, but we didn't dare move toward each other."

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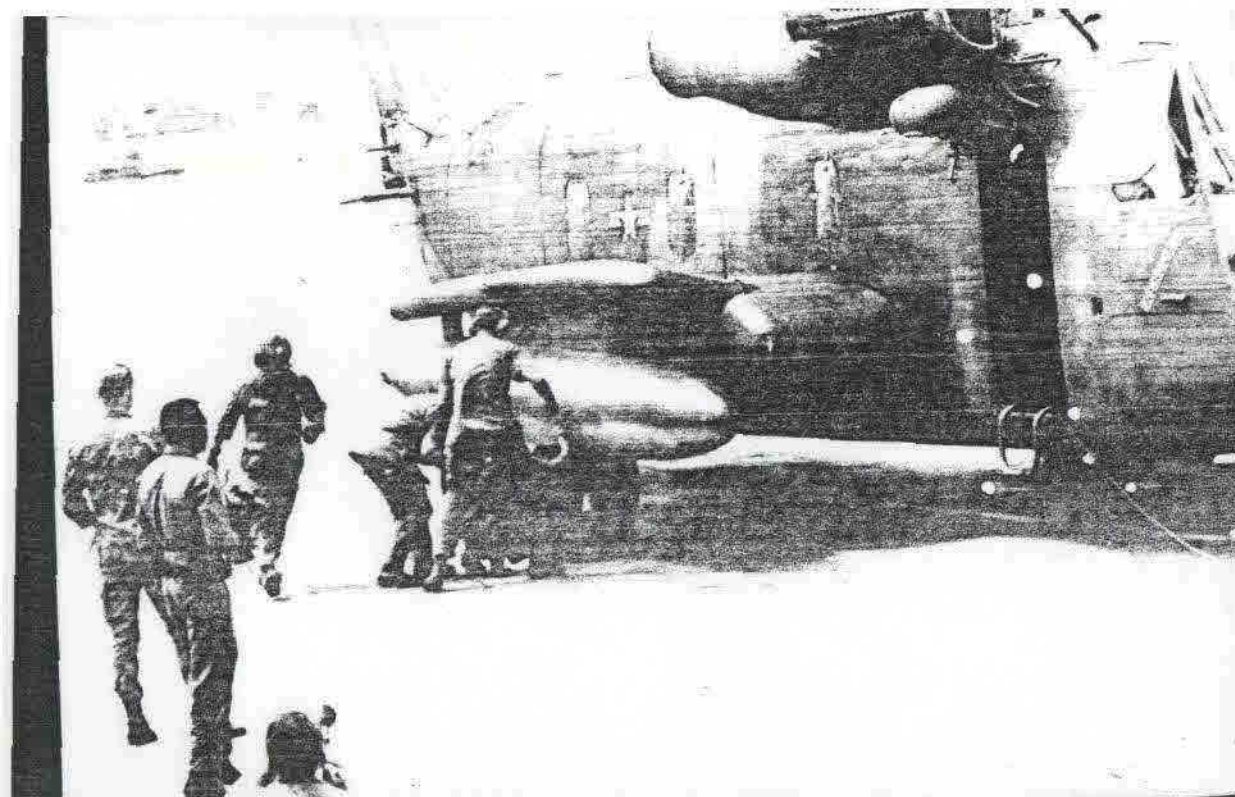
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26 FEB 71

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