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WITCHDOCTOR U.S. STAFF AND RECOVERY (SANDY 04)

DECLASSIFIED

3 MAR 71
SAR

(C) Search and Recovery forces waged a fierce two day war in an effort to rescue seven United States Army personnel who survived the crash of Witchdoctor 05, a helicopter supporting a major invasion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex in Laos. The helicopter had received battle damage and made a controlled crash landing in an extremely contested area at 263/46 from Tacan Channel 103 located at Quang Tri Air Base, Republic of Vietnam. All seven survivors egressed from the aircraft uninjured and took cover in a bomb crater to wait for assistance. They survived enemy assaults for two days and three nights while they helped to direct air strikes on gun emplacements and enemy personnel. They were finally rescued on the third day by army ground forces of an undisclosed nationality. ¹⁶¹

(C) An untold number of aircraft participated in the effort and several pick up attempts were prevented by the intense enemy resistance. The enemy continually hammered away at all aircraft with small arms, automatic weapons, anti-aircraft equipment and rockets. Resistance became particularly intense each time a helicopter was brought in and on one occasion the pilot of a US Army helicopter was shot in the face but was able to escape safely. During the effort six A-1 aircraft received battle damage. One of them caught fire and exploded in the air and another was forced to make a gear up landing at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB. ¹⁶²

161. SARCO Report for Witchdoctor 05, Document #7.

162. Ibid.

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(C) The survivors were down in well defended enemy territory in an area of rolling hills with sparse to heavy vegetation. Several trails, many bunkers and a multitude of bomb craters could be observed in their vicinity. They were completely surrounded by enemy forces and the only known friendly ground forces were located approximately four miles to the southeast. Ground fire was coming from positions very near the survivors and it was necessary to attack the very proximity of the bomb crater which protected them. On one occasion an F-4 missed his target and discharged napalm on the objective position. None of the survivors were injured but it was necessary to vacate the area temporarily due to fires started by the napalm. On another occasion a B-52 strike dropped bombs and one A-1 pilot said some of the bombs landed within 50 meters of the survivors.¹⁶³

(C) On the second day of the effort Sandy 01/02 were busy striking enemy positions when Sandy 01 detected hydraulic fumes in his cockpit. He decided to return home and enroute the aileron boost quit. A short while later he tried to open the canopy but there was insufficient hydraulic pressure. He was successful in jettisoning the canopy by using the emergency air bottle. Approximately 25 miles from the base he ran out of oxygen and was forced to sit with his face near the slip stream to breath and avoid the fumes. The loss of hydraulics prevented

163. Ibid.

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Sandy 01 from lowering his main landing gear although his tail gear did come down successfully. Emergency gear extraction procedures failed and it was necessary for Sandy 01 to land gear up. The runway was prepared and emergency forces stood by while Sandy 01 put his tail hook down and performed a gear up approach and successfully engaged the runway barrier. The emergency landing was accomplished without further incident and the pilot walked away uninjured.¹⁶⁴

(C) Later that morning at approximately 0755L Sandy 04 was making passes to position smoke rockets when he was hit by ground fire. His left wing caught fire, he jettisoned his ordnance and took up an easterly heading. He was able to ride the burning aircraft to a safer area prior to ejecting. Sandy 04 parachuted safely to the ground seconds before the aircraft exploded. A rescue helicopter, Jolly Green 71, observed the entire incident and followed Sandy 04's parachute to the ground. He went into a hover over the pilot, dropped a jungle penetrator and immediately picked up the survivor. The Jolly Green was able to egress safely although the helicopter had received ground fire throughout the procedure. The safe recovery of Sandy 04 was the result of immediate and decisive action taken by Jolly Green 71. The pilot was rescued before the enemy could determine his position and move defenses into the area. The other four A-1's which received battle damage landed with further incident.¹⁶⁵

164. Ibid.

165. Ibid.

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(C) At 1615L on the second day of the SAR, the US Army stated that they were taking charge of the rescue and the Air Force portion of the effort was terminated. During that night a heavy mortar barrage was executed in the area around the survivors and on the morning of 7 March 1971 an armored column of undisclosed size moved in and safely rescued the seven survivors. Two days of sustained air attacks and the heavy mortar barrage on the previous night made it possible for the ground rescue forces to complete the rescue with relatively light resistance.¹⁶⁶

166. Ibid.

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A last-light run-in was attempted but was aborted when both helicopters took hits from heavy small arms fire. One Pararescue man was wounded in this attempt. A first-light effort on 2 January resulted in a successful rescue of both crewmembers.

(S) BIGOT 02: On 3 February, two crewmembers of an F-4D bailed out of Bankari² Pass near the NVN border. 40th ARRS Jolly Greens were scrambled from both Nakhon Phanom Airfield³ and Ubon RTAFB⁴. Low ceilings precluded any attempt that day. A maximum effort SAR was planned on the 4th with 8 Jolly Greens in place at NKP for a first-light effort. HH-53 BUFFs were on continuous airborne orbit from pre-dawn to darkness on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of February. Continued low ceilings and bad weather conditions in the area precluded any rescue attempts. After all radio contact was lost with the survivors at noon on the 6th, and no weather improvement forecast, the active participation of the 40th ARRS ceased. The force of tired and disappointed crews were returned to Udorn that night.

(S) DUDLEY 02: On 16 February, two crewmembers of an F-D bailed out in eastern Laos. Two Jolly Greens scrambled and both crewmembers were rescued less than two hours after bailout.

(S) WITCHDOCTOR 05: On 5 March, an Army UH-1 helicopter was shot down in eastern Laos with 7 people on board. A last-light run-in was attempted but intensive AAA and small arms fire precluded any rescues. The survivors were rescued by a U.S. Army ground team on 7 March.

GROUP 4

During period of 1 Jan to 31 Mar 1971
all personnel were accounted for
after 12 hours

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FROM: 1st SOS (Lt Col Adams/2754)

SUBJECT: SARCO's Report for WITCHDOCTOR 05

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1. A successful rescue was conducted on 5 Mar 1971 for Witchdoctor 05, an Army helicopter, at approximately 261/46/ch 103. Final recovery of the survivors was accomplished by an Army armored column of unknown nationality. All times are Thailand local.

2. On the afternoon of 5 Mar 1971 an Army helicopter, Witchdoctor 05, with 7 S.O.B.'s was shot down along the forward lines of the Vietnamese push into Laos toward the Tchepone area. The chopper made a controlled crash, without injury to any of the occupants. The survivors left the chopper and hid in some bushes and trees within 300 meters of the crash site. The area was a very heavily contested area. Much ground fighting was evidenced and for several days air strikes had been placed in an area completely surrounding the crash site. Radio contact was established immediately by a nearby Hammer PAC. The Sandy force was called into the action at NKP at approximately 1500, however, the Sandys from Da Nang had been launched at 1320.

3. 5 Mar 71
C/S

	LAUNCH TIME (LOCATION)	REMARKS	(LDG SITE)
<u>SANDY</u> 09	05/1320 (Da Nang)	OSC Battle Damage	(Da Nang)
10	05/1320 (Da Nang)	Battle Damage	(Da Nang)
03	05/1505 (NKP)	OSC Battle Damage	(NKP)
04	05/1505 (NKP)	Battle Damage	(NKP)
01	05/1540 (NKP)	JG Escort - Rough Engine	(NKP)
02	05/1540 (NKP)		
05	05/1540 (UDON)	Strike Acft & OSC for Beddown	(NKP)
06	05/1540		

SMOKE 41
42

05/1645 (NKP)

(NKP)

6 Mar 71

<u>SANDY</u> 01	06/0455 (NKP)	OSC - Battle Damage Gear up landing	(NKP)
02	06/0455		
C7	06/0540 (BIEN HOA)	Preposition for SAR	(NKP)
C8	06/0540		
C3	06/0620 (NKP)	OSC	(NKP)
04	06/0620 (NKP)	Bailed out/PU By JG 71	
<u>SMOKE</u> 41	06/0818 (NKP)	Held Till Bingo Fuel	(NKP)
42	06/0818 (NKP)		
<u>SANDY</u> 05	06/0825 (NKP)	OSC	(NKP)
06	06/0825 (NKP)		
11	06/1025 (NKP)		
12	06/1025 (NKP)		



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C/S	LAUNCH TIME (LOCATION)	REMARKS	(LDG SITE)
DECLASSIFIED	(NKP)	JG Escort & OSC	(NKP)
SANDY 13	06/1355 (NKP)	OSC (Dropped Survival Kit)	(NKP)
14	06/1605		(NKP)
15	06/1705 (NKP)	Orbit in Vicinity of SAR	(NKP)
16	06/1705		

4. The general area consisted of low rolling hills, sparse to heavy vegetation, several trails and many bunkers and bomb craters. The weather was scattered with visibility most significant. Haze restricted visibility to less than 1 mile into the sun and up to 5 miles down-sun.

5. The Hammer FAC's were in the area supporting the ground war and were immediately available to locate the survivors prior to the arrival of the Sandys. They also were used extensively for fast mover strikes on 5 and 6 of March.

6. The attachments of this report will best describe the events as seen from the position of the Sandy and Smoke pilots. A brief overlay of the SAR follows. On 5 March during the first afternoon of the SAR, it was apparent that a very difficult SAR was in progress. Intelligence reports placed the survivor in the worst possible position, completely surrounded by enemy. The nearest friendly ground forces were 3-4 miles south and east. The Sandys did the usual preparatory things, trolling the area for gunfire and trying to locate the survivors position accurately. Fast mover strikes were put in to silence 23 and 37mm guns. Small arms fire was continuous and Sandys expanded as close to the survivors as possible. Sandy 09 and 13 received extensive battle damage and RTB'd to Da Nang. Sandy 03 attempted a pickup using a smoke screen. The JG was forced out of the area by a heretofore unknown 23mm that came up right under him and rescue efforts were terminated for 5 Mar. The few remaining minutes of daylight were used for further gun suppression. Beddown instructions were given to the survivors and a first light effort planned for 6 Mar.

6 Mar 1971 - Through the night, fast mover ordnance was requested and Jack was advised of the extreme shortage of A-1 resources. Request for austere use of Sandy was finally agreed upon and the first light effort was launched. Realizing that several guns had to be killed prior to any pickup attempt, the launch of JG escorts was delayed. The first Sandy OSC received ground fire and lost his hydraulic system. He was forced to RTB and land gear up at NKP. Through the remainder of the day, heavy strikes were put in by fast movers. Hard bombs as well as nape and high drags were used in close proximity to the survivors. At approximately 0740, during an attempt to mark an ingress route for the choppers, Sandy 04 was hit in the wing and caught fire. He stayed with the aircraft long enough to get away from the scene before ejecting.

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B. Joker, King, Queen, & Jack must be responsive to requests for information from the NKP SARCO. The shortage of aircraft must be met with the strictest conservation of resources and a constant awareness of the requirements. Bingo times must be updated at least hourly to allow lead time for launches and to preclude having a void of On-Scene-Commanders. Since all SARCO's are also Sandy qualified, their suggestions should be strongly considered whenever possible.

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C. Several aircraft took battle damage from all types of gunfire. The Sandy pilots must be cautioned to be less aggressive in the face of insurmountable obstacles. Low trolling is unnecessary while 23's and 37's are still alive and known. Some heavily defended areas may take days of softening up, prior to the first attempt at pickup. Heavy concentrations of small arms fire is as deadly as occasional 23 and 37mm fire. Standard ordnance may not ever be able to neutralize the enemy if they are in shored up positions. It may be necessary to devise special ordnances that can get down into holes and may require a harder look at the use of certain C/S agents.

D. Reinstruct King to keep primary VHF clear for transmissions to Sandy Low element.

E. The A-1 is as important to rescue in opposed areas as is the JG. Without a high success rate on SRS, morale of the combat flyers will deteriorate. An attempt to increase, rather than decrease, the number of A-1's should be a priority project at the highest level.

Robert S. Adams

ROBERT S. ADAMS, Lt Colonel, USAF
1st SOS NKP

Atch - I
II
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SANDY 01/02 - WITCHDOCTOR 05 / 5 Mar 71

Sandy 01 and Sandy 02 launched at 1540 local for Witchdoctor 05 SAR effort. Picked up Jolly Greens 56/57 to enter Ordinance area trails and hold south of D-12 area. On command to execute the pickup phase we led JG 56 to the run in IP and started final approach phase. When the JG was descending on the final at approximately 1/2 mile from the survivors position two 23mm guns opened fire on the JG as he passed over the guns. One 37mm gun also fired on the JG and Sandys. JG 56 continued the descent and track to the smoked area and safely egressed to the south.

At the time of this attempted pickup Sandy 01 experienced a rough engine and loss UHF radio. Sandy 02 attempted to silence the 23mm site with guns and exited the area to escort Sandy 01 to NKP. Sandy 01 jettisoned all ordnance and tanks and proceeded with rough engine and occasional backfires to NKP. Sandy 02 jettisoned tanks, CBU and LAU-3's to facilitate escort and recovered at 1900 local.

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SANDY 01/02 - WITCHDOCTOR 05/6 Mar 71

Sandy 01 and Sandy 02 were launched at 0450 on a first light effort the second day of the SAR. The flight to the SAR area about 20 minutes before the night FAC capping the survivors when we arrived. He said he had not heard from them, but they had been briefed not to use their radio unless they needed something. Hammer 86 did not know the survivors location.

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As it began to get light we circled high and familiarized ourselves with the general area. No enemy activity or response had been observed during the night. After circling for a few minutes, an emergency beeper sounded on guard for a few seconds. I immediately asked for the beeper to come up voice and got a response from Witchdoctor 05. He had left his bunker and was hiding in heavy brush not far from it. He said he had heard trucks and activity most of the night about 300-400 meters East and Southeast of him, and also numerous troops in his immediate area. He asked us to expend some ordnance to cover his movement back into the bunker. We went through a short search and after locating his approximate position, began to drop CSU-25. All seven survivors moved back into the bunker. During this time the survivors kept us posted on ground fire, which consisted of small arms and automatic weapons. Each time we got any reaction we would expend on it. The bad guys had partially camouflaged the downed chopper and were taking parts off of it; they also were firing at us from it, so we strafed it and set it on fire. I put in a pair of F-4's with high drags and napalm. They laid it right on target. At this point I smelled hydraulic fumes in my cockpit. I called King and informed him we needed the next set of Sandys. The Hammer FAC had been monitoring our transmissions and knew where the survivors were, so I started back to base. Very shortly after smelling fumes, the hydraulic pressure began to fluctuate. I dumped the pressure to prevent additional loss of the hydraulic fluid. About 10 minutes later the aileron boost quit. A short while later I tried to open the canopy, but the hydraulic pressure would not come up after pushing the pressure release handle in. I then blew it open with the air bottle. About 25 miles from the base I ran out of oxygen and had to sit with my face near the slip stream to breath. When I was about 17 miles out I put the pressure release handle in and put the gear lever down. The tail wheel went down, but not the main gear. I actuated the auxiliary hydraulic pump, with no results. I then went to the emergency gear down position and still got no results. I then porpoised and yawned the airplane and slowed down to about 110 knots. I put the tail hook down and it worked. After burning off fuel and jettisoning my remaining stores I made a gear up approach and engagement.

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SANDY 03/04 - 5 Mar 1971

Sandy 03 and Sandy 04 were scheduled for a normal Tango Orbit with a 1500 local takeoff. Just prior to taking the active, Sandy 03 and 04 were informed via Tee-Pee to direct to the 03/04 mission on channel 103 for an active SAR. Parbat was in contact with contact established with King. The situation briefed by King was that an Army helicopter with 7 survivors was down at an area just west of D-12. Sandy 09 and 10 had been on scene from Da Nang with Sandy 10 being escorted back to Da Nang with severe battle damage. Sandy 03 and 04 arrived on scene about 1610 local and were immediately briefed on the situation by Sandy 09. At the time, Sandy 09 was low on fuel with minor battle damage. Due to the situation of Sandy 09, Sandy 03 took immediate on scene command at 1620 local. Hammer 241 was aware of the survivors location and was presently putting in fast mover Napalm strikes just north of the crash scene. Sandy 03 was then briefed by Hammer 241 and shown the exact location of the survivors and downed Helicopter. Sandy 03 then made contact with Witchdoctor 05 and proceeded to make numerous low level passes to pinpoint the small arms fire. On all passes Sandy 03 received intense ground fire from the south and west of the survivors. The ground fire was also pinpointed on each of Sandy 03's passes by Witchdoctor. Sandy 03 and 04 then made 5 or 6 low level CBU and Strafe passes to the north and south of the survivors. Sandy 03 then went back to troll for more ground fire and on the second pass received 7.62mm battle damage in the left gear and centerline tank area. Sandy 03 then had Hammer 241 put in 3 more flights of fast mover strikes to the south and west of the survivors. Again Sandy 03 and 04 went low and experienced little or no small arms fire on 4 or 5 low level passes in the area of the survivors. Sandy 03 had now lost his radio, so all SAR forces had to work on UHF radio 364.2 and reserved guard channel for the survivor and himself. At 1730 local Sandy 03 brought in Sandy 01 and 02 (Helicopter escorts) and Smoke 41 and 42 to brief them on the survivor location, too far mark, IP mark, and the smoke pattern. Sandy 04 stayed with the Jolly Green choppers while the briefing was taking place. After the Sandy 01 and 02 and smoke flight returned to the IP (250/45/103), Sandy 03 briefed Sandy 05 and 06 on a CBU-25 run just north of the Helicopter and south of the road. When this was completed Sandy 03 brought the Jolly Green's, Sandy 01 and 02, smokes and Sandy 04 up to guard channel for a check-in. Sandy 03 then instructed Witchdoctor that we would be executing shortly and when and how to use his smoke flare. At 1750 local Sandy 03 directed the smoke aircraft to lay their screen 30 seconds apart and to have the Jolly Greens and escort to start their run to the final IP in one minute. The smoke screen was excellent. There was some confusion with the Jolly Green low bird and escort on the final turn to run-in.

At a half mile from the Helicopter Witchdoctor was told to pop his smoke. The purple smoke started up and all looked good, when suddenly a 23mm gun started firing at the Jolly Green from a point beneath him. Sandy 01 ordered a emergency egress to the north.

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All forces returned to the holding point. Sandy 01 developed engine problems and was escorted to NRP by Sandy 02. It was now dark and with the 37mm and 23mm guns spotted, Sandy 03 elected to bed down the survivors. On scene command was passed to Sandy 05 at 1830 local in order that he accurately pinpoint and possibly destroy the guns.

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SANDY 05/06 - WITCHDOCTOR 05/5 Mar 71

On 5 Mar 71 Sandy 05 and Sandy 06 took off from Ubon at 1530. After airborne we heard that there was a SAM in process. We proceeded to the area and Sandy 03 decided to use us as strike targets. We held high and didn't seem to draw any ground fire. We held high while they made an attempt. On the run in I saw two 23mm come up at the Jolly Green and called the other Sandy to the positions and Sandy 04 took care of one of the positions.. At about this time the attempt was aborted and the forces went out to regroup. It was getting dark and the other Sandys were getting low on gas so they RTB'd and I took on-scene-commander about 1830. I marked the big gun position for a fast mover flight but they went home for fuel. The next idea was to possibly get a dust-off 40 in, under the course of darkness, while we tried to fight the guns with our rockets and guns. This never materialized and we RTB'd at 1915.

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SANDY 09/10 - 5 Mar 1971

We were launched from Da Nang the first day of the SAR. We held for about 30 minutes while Hammer 55 backed 2 F-4's on gun positions around the survivors. ~~He was not allowed to try a pickup because he hadn't received any ground fire.~~ I told King we wanted the on-scene-command to do some trolling. On our second pass over the area, the whole world broke loose. Witchdoctor 05 said we were taking automatic weapons fire from numerous positions to the south, east and north of their position. I had not pinpointed the survivors yet but had their deamed chopper and it took about 5 more passes to pinpoint them in a bomb crater. After finding them we started to work on silencing the gun positions ourselves because we had no fast mover ordnance available at the time. Sandy 10 and I, by using directions from the survivors started quieting down the area. There were numerous ZPU, 51 cal and 12.7 positions around. I received a few hits from 51 cal and Sandy 10 was hit twice causing him to lose his hydraulic pressure and RTB to Da Nang. I would have returned with him but the Hammer that was working with us decided to leave and not tell anyone. I found myself alone with the survivors so I remained on-scene. I continued trolling using the survivors to tell me where the ground fire was coming from. When my ordnance was just about exhausted another Hammer arrived on scene. I marked the gun positions for him and briefed him on the survivors position. I then briefed Sandy 03 & 04 on the situation and RTB'd for a lack of ordnance and not fuel.

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SMOKE 41/42/5 Mar 71.

At Smoke 41 and 42, myself and Captain Little scramble at 1645 local on 5 Mar 71. Due to the lateness of the day we proceeded directly across the trail and arrived on scene at 1700. The second smoke element, 43 and 44, were held at NKP by Jack for reasons unknown.

Due to the intensity of the fire in the immediate area, the Jolly lead elected to move 5 miles east of the objective area. Sandy 05 later came up and moved us all east again as our holding area was not deemed secure. This put us a long distance from the SAR and as darkness was approaching and we were east of the SAR area looking into the haze we could not see anything, including smoke.

Sandy 05, the on-scene-commander ordered us forward which took longer than anticipated as we had no TACAN, and my ADF function was written out in the 761. My wingman's wife was terrible, and we proceeded on a guess as to the area and finally got joined. As time was running out for the last light, Sandy 05 took me over the area and showed me where the desired smoke was to be placed. He did this also with Smoke 42 due to the pressuring time element and restricted visibility. Sporadic ground fire was observed and reported by the survivors although I only saw a few winks SE of their location at this time.

The command of execution was given and Sandy 05 and 06 opened up with a CBU and Strafe run which raised a large dirt cloud along our inbound run. I laid my smoke first and saw a lot of small arms fire from the same place I previously had noted it. Also saw some larger tracers go by but don't know where they came from. The heaviest fire was again right where Smoke 42 was to place his smoke, which he did excellently. The smoke formed an alley but the chopper got hosed as he maneuvered to the entry point of the alley and after a gaggle in avoiding all kinds of guns that came up, the attempt was terminated and all forces RTB'd.

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