

21Jul71

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS (FIRST OAK LEAF CLUSTER) TO JAMES D. ADAMS

Technical Sergeant James D. Adams distinguished himself by heroism while participating in aerial flight as an HH-53 Flight Engineer in Southeast Asia on 21 July 1971. On that date, Sergeant Adams was sent on a mission to retrieve a downed aircraft deep within hostile territory. The recovery aircraft lost power while attempting the pickup, and Sergeant Adams, with complete disregard for his own safety, physically dove across the helicopter to jettison an external load in an attempt to keep the aircraft airborne. In so doing, he placed himself in a dangerously unprotected position and did indeed sustain serious injuries. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Adams reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Here is the story in the words of Sergeant Adams

We (Myself as FE, Maj. Clyde Bennett as Pilot, Capt. Hugh something or other (CRS) we called him "Butch" as Co-Pilot and 2 PJ's; S/Sgt Jon Holberg, S/Sgt Chuck McGrath) were tasked to recover an unmanned reconnaissance drone out of Northern Laos and return it to NKP. We would be a single bird mission. Our call sign was JG 54 (HH-53C 68-8285).

The longest sling rig we could find was only about 50 ft. long. The Intelligence guys told us "Don't worry, There are no real tall trees in the area". Just for good measure, we brought some extra 2000 lb. cargo straps on board that we could use in a pinch.

We were told that there were no hostile forces in the area and it would be a piece of cake. When we got up north of Vientien we were to contact "Raven" (don't remember the rest of his call sign) and he would take us to within visual of the Drone.

WELLLLLL, the weather was shitty with low clouds. The MSL altitude of the recovery site was about 6000 ft. on the side of a hill and the trees had to be about 150 to 200 feet tall. We hovered over the site and discussed what we thought we should do. It was decided by all that we could tie a series of cargo straps to the sling we had until it was long enough to reach the ground and then lower it all through the cargo sling hatch.

But before we could do that we needed to take on some fuel because we certainly couldn't hook up to a tanker with the Drone on a sling and we didn't have enough fuel to get back to NKP. We called for a tanker and arranged to meet him at 11,000 feet further south of our location. We took on some fuel and then went back down to where we thought the Drone was.

Wouldn't you know it, some more clouds had moved into the area and we couldn't find the damn thing. We called the "Raven" and he said Don't worry I'll take you to it. Well with some effort he did and we finally got back over the Drone.

I put Jon Holberg on the ground with the rescue hoist and Chuck and I tied all the cargo straps to the sling and put it down through the hole. Jon said it was too short by about a couple of feet. I told the pilot to go lower and by the time Jon said he had enough sling to hook up, we were sitting with the belly of the chopper in the tops of the trees.

I was standing in the door getting ready to lower the hoist so I could bring Jon back up into the chopper and all of a sudden I heard a loud "Bang" and we started settling into the trees. I hit the quick release on my gunners belt and dove onto my belly by the cargo sling door with the intention of releasing the cargo sling.

Too Late! By that time we were in the trees with the main rotor blades doing their best to chop down all those trees. Then the Bird started to roll down the hill. Without my gunners belt on, I was rolling around and banging around inside that thing like a BB in a tin can.

Finally it stopped rolling and I found myself lying on my back on the ceiling of the cabin soaked in JP-4 and God knows what else. I thought to myself "I've got to get out of here, this thing is going to catch fire". I saw a hole in the side and daylight. I stumbled through that and saw one of the engines lying in the grass, still spooling down.

I ran as best I could to what I thought was a safe distance from the Chopper and laid down because my back was really hurting. Pretty soon Maj. Bennett came over to me and ask me how I was. I told him I thought my back was broken. He said okay don't move. Jon is hurt really bad and Chuck is doing what he can for him. Help is on the way.

It was about that time that I thought I heard some gunfire but I couldn't be sure. Chuck finished doing what he could for Jon and came over to look at me. He checked me over and said that he thought my back was broken. He also told me that a piece of rotor blade had hit Jon and took off his whole lower jaw and he was bleeding pretty bad.

We had made such a big hole when we crashed that an Air America Huey landed and picked up Jon and I and took us to the Swiss Red Cross Hospital in Vientien. I Guess it was the next morning when they flew us out to NKP.

By the way, the guy flying the Raven was named Jim Roper. He has written a book oddly enough called "Raven" and there is a whole chapter in the book about that day and JG 54.

My back was broken in 3 places and after I got back to a hospital in the States, they found that my pelvis had also been broken but it was too late to do anything about it because by the time they discovered it, it had started to heal.

In the hospital at NKP they discovered that I had chemical burns on my back from the JP-4 and started to treat that.

While I was in the hospital at NKP somebody told me that they had sent a chopper in there from the 21st SOS to the crash site to take pictures and they took a lot of ground fire. In fact, one of the Pilots (I forget his name) from the 40th who went along as an observer got shot through both his legs.

I also learned that the day before we went up there they had tried to get an Army CH-54 Crane in there and they had taken so much ground fire that they had to withdraw and abort their mission. Joy, Joy, Joy!!!!!!!!!!!!

Anyway, after they got me stabilized at the hospital in NKP, they sent me to Clark AFB in the P.I. After about 10 days there, they sent me to Japan for some more treatment. Then they sent me to Scott AFB for a couple of days. From Scott they sent me to Fitzsimmons Army hospital in Denver. Finally they sent me to Offutt AFB in Omaha which was the closest hospital to where my wife was in Topeka KS.

An interesting footnote to this whole thing was when they put Jon Holberg and I into the Air America Huey, he was on his hands and knees and bleeding very badly. I looked over at him and saw that he was writing with his finger dipping in his own blood "Where we going"... That's what I call bravery!!!!

For a story by a PJ on the mission and pictures [CLICK HERE](#)

Drone Rescue by Chuck McGrath PJ, 40th ARRS, NKP 1971-72

I was rescued by an Air America H-34 crew on 21 July 1971.
Location: Some distance north of the PDJ.

We were tasked as a single Jolly Green (HH-53) crew to recover a drone, and ended up going down during the effort just as we were picking the #1 PJ by hoist. Rolled over a couple times and ended up against some trees. Loss was later determined to be from groundfire in the area. Crews involved in the rescue saw the Jolly upside down up against some trees on the downslope side of a small clearing. Drone in middle of clearing. Tip tanks were jettisoned in area of drone. Drone parachute in trees at upper end of clearing. Three crewmembers (pilot, copilot, and FE) at lower end of slope. Two others (PJs) about the middle of the clearing.

A Huey came in first. Picked up the FE, suffering from severe back pains, (later learned he had ruptured disc in spine), by having him grab the skids so they could hover taxi with him further up the slope to where I was with the other PJ, who had extensive facial injuries. My partner was hit by a rotor blade as the helo went down. We got the FE in the Huey, I passed Jon's IV bottle up to someone in the Huey, and then we got Jon in. I got in to help treat them.

I guess there wasn't enough lift to get us out of there, because one of the Air America crew tapped me on the shoulder and motioned for me to get out. Just what I needed! Out I go. Huey spins around, comes close to giving me a crewcut with the tail rotor, and exits successfully.



About 10 minutes later a H-34 comes in and picks up pilot and copilot with hoist and horse collar. Hoist breaks with me about 10 feet up and I'm back on the ground again with the hoist operator reeling in the cable by hand as they exit the area.

I heard some periodic ground fire while taking stock of the situation.

I guess it was about 10 or 15 minutes later - who kept track? Another H-34 came in and picked me up by horse collar. We were all taken to Lima 54, where the pilot, copilot, and I got a hop on an Air America C-130 to Udorn. The three of us were bruised up, nothing serious, but they stuck us in the hospital there for the night. I still don't know how the injured FE and my partner got back to Udorn, but they were there in the hospital when we woke up the next morning.

Flight the next day to determine whether helo was recoverable was greeted by so much groundfire that the Sandies were directed to destroy the Jolly.