

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

FROM: 1st SCS (Maj Miller/2010)

13 December, 1971

SUBJECT: SARCO Report, Ashcan 01

TO: 56 SCW (DO)

1. On 10 December, 1971, a SAR was declared at 1025L for Ashcan 01, a F-105, approximate location 075/65/89. Jack launched Sandy 01 & 02, plus Jolly Greens 52, 57, 53 & 30. Radio contact was established with Ashcan 01A, who was reported in good spirits although he apparently had a broken arm and possibly a broken leg.
2. SARCO requested and Jack approved launch of Sandy 03 & 04 for escort of the Jolly Greens. Sandy 01 & 02 were airborne at 1039L and Sandy 03 & 04 were airborne at 1056L.
3. Combat Operations coordinated the release of other Hobo assets to give a back-up Sandy capability and Smoke resources. Sandy 04 air aborted and Sandy 09 & 10 were launched to replace them. Jack did scramble Sandy 05 & 06 for this but their launch was cancelled and Sandy 09 & 10 were airborne at 1152L.
4. Additional aircraft were then uploaded to Smoke configuration as they became available. Jolly had requested further Smoke aircraft be uploaded and aircraft previously designated as Sandy back-up were re-loaded. The aircraft in Sandy 03 flight were repaired and used for Sandy 11 & 12 as they became available.
5. Pave Nail FACs were requested and a local training flight was diverted to this mission, and an additional sortie was generated.
6. Jolly Green 32 & 55 had been launched from Ubon and were then recovered at NKP to be used as back-up.
7. Word was received at 1152L that the early portion of Phase Bravo was in effect and Jolly Green 52 had a chute in sight and was putting a P.J. down. This was terminated at 1203L and the chute was determined not to be that of a survivor.
8. Good radio contact was maintained with Ashcan 01 A, but weather at his location was reported as "on the trees". Jolly Green 52 flight pulled out to air refuel at 1348L and Jolly Green 53 flight assumed the search. Another set of Sandys was requested as Sandy 01 & 02 would reach Bingo fuel shortly. At 1350L Sandy 11 & 12 were notified and were airborne at 1422L.
9. Smoke was requested by Jack at 1408L and Smoke 44 & 45 were airborne at 1429L, Smoke 46 & 47 were airborne at 1432L. A report was received at this time that Jolly Green 52 had taken some small arms hits, but no problems were evident and he was remaining in the effort.
10. During the period from 1430L to approximately 1530L much confusion was apparent in the radio transmissions with requests for Fast Mover Smoke and the reasons they were not able to launch. Also during this time the status and number of Pave Nail equipped aircraft was confused and coordination through

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Combat Operations eventually straightened this out. Pave Nail 07 did RTB at 1500L and he passed a very accurate location of the downed crewmember.

11. Sandy 07 & 08 were scheduled for rotation from Da Nang back to NKP and they were used to relieve Sandy 09 & 10. They arrived in the area at approximately 1630L and Sandy 11 then assumed on-scene command from Sandy 09.

12. During the period 1530L to 1800L many requests for ordnance were relayed through King and the ordnance was apparently not available. Pave Nail FACs were scheduled through-out the night and they would be assuming on-scene command.

13. An additional Smoke flight was launched, Smoke 42 & 43 at Blue Chip's request and they were airborne at 1830L. Sandys and Jollys on-scene RTB'd at night fall and recovered at NKP between 1825L and 1840L.

14. During the night contact was maintained with Ashcan 01 A by the Nail FAC on-scene-commanders. However the ordnance which had been requested by King was not available, or not coordinated, until approximately 0200, 11 December. I was debriefed at 2200L by the first Pave Nail On-scene commander during the night and he had received no ordnance.

15. The first-light effort was coordinated locally and briefing for all aircrews was set for 0330L, 11 December. Take-off times were established so the forces could be over the survivor at first-light. These forces included 4 Sandy aircraft, 4 Jolly Greens, a Pave Nail FAC, and a visual FAC. Smoke aircraft were also on ground alert at this time.

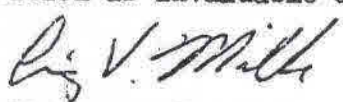
16. All forces arrived in the survivors area at approximately 0550L. Weather was reported as still on the trees, good voice contact was again established with Ashcan 01 A.

17. Fast Mover Smoke was launched at 0650L. Smoke pilots here were alerted but not utilized.

18. Jolly Green 30 reported visual contact with Ashcan 01 B at 0710L, reported to be inactive and J.G. 30 continued to Ashcan 01 A position. A P.J. was put on the ground and the survivor was successfully picked up at 0717L. All SAR forces RTB'd to NKP at 0725L.

19. Survivor and all forces recovered at NKP at 0735L. SAR terminated.

20. The Pave Nail FACs and their equipment capabilities and limitations must be briefed to all concerned agencies. This equipment can now enable the SAR forces to continue their efforts throughout the night to isolate the survivor from hostile forces. The capability to accurately locate the survivor's position is invaluable during a prolonged SAR such as this one.

  
CRAIG V. MILLER, Major, USAF  
SARCO, 1st SCS

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Sandy 01 flight was scrambled for cockpit alert at 0320Z 10 Dec. Prior to reaching the aircraft, Sandy 01 flight received a launch order, and instructed Sandy Three and Four to assume cockpit alert. At 0330Z King passed coordinates to Sandy One indicating that the SAR scene was in an extremely high threat area, and Sandy 01 requested immediate launch of Sandy Three flight, BLU-52, CBU-49, and CBU-42. Sandy 01 flight was airborne at 0339Z, with some difficulty experienced in the arming area with a slow-arming crew.

Sandy 01 flight rendezvoused with Nail 49 and Nail 43, who had taken on-scene command at the time the downed aircraft, Ashcan 01, (F-105F) had been hit by a SAM. Nail 49 briefed Sandy 01 on the area, defenses, and E & E areas. The survivor was in high ground just west of the center of Mu Ghia Pass, and the immediate area was covered with a solid low cloud deck. Sandy 01 took on-scene command and verified Ashcan 01's approximate position using UHF timing cuts provided by the Nails and by flying low over the clouds until the survivor heard the A-1 directly overhead.

Sandy 01 then attempted to fly over the survivor under the clouds. Ceilings deteriorated from approximately 300 feet within ten KM of the survivor down to zero at a point approximately two clicks short of his position. Sandy 01 and 02 were forced to pull up and then fly back down through the pass itself in order to avoid the weather-obscured high ground to the North.

At this time it was decided that A-1s could not hope to operate below the clouds, but that the high ground appeared free of any enemy activity

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

It was decided by Sandy 01 and Jolly Green 52 that the Jolly would attempt to search the area under the clouds alone. It was at this time that the capabilities of the Pavenail OV-10 were utilized, and this system contributed significantly to what was to be a very different kind of SAR. Nail 07, Pavenail equipped, joined on Sandy 01's wing and was led over the survivor above the weather. Nail 07 thus obtained a LORAN location which could serve as a permanent reference for entire SAR force. Nail 07 then vectored Jolly 52 in above the clouds, allowing the Jolly to zero its doppler gear on the same fix.

This entire process took only fifteen minutes, and saved valuable time in the search which followed. JG52 then began what was to be a seven hour search in the weather. Sandy acted as radio relay between the Jolly and Ashcan 01. Nail 07 continued to act as a sort of airborne GCI site for the Jolly, using the Pavenail Loran and UHF homing.

Further checks with Ashcan 01 determined that he had a broken arm and leg injury. He had two survival radios, and checks were made of each. He also had his flares and gyrojet. At one point, JG52 located a parachute and asked Ashcan to pop a smoke. It was later determined that the chute had been a flare chute and was located some 3-4 klicks Southwest of the survivor's actual position. Also during this time, the Jolly received small arms fire from a point near the rim of the pass well SW of Ashcan's position. A single gyrojet round was requested by Sandy 01 and Ashcan, fired. However the rocket did not appear to clear the clouds.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

During one of JG52's efforts to locate a closer break in the undercast, a SAM warning was broadcast and Sandy 01 observed the SAM tracking JG52 and Sandy 01. The missile broke out above clouds, passed directly under JG52, continued on toward Sandy 01, and reentered the clouds below without detonating. An unknown number of SAM's and unguided rockets were fired at the SAR force and it's Ironhand and MIG-cap cover. These firings continued into the night.

Sandy 01 flight reached fuel bingo at approximately 0600Z, and briefed Sandy 01 flight. JG52 and 53 were trading off on the low-altitude search, one searching while the other returned to King to refuel. Sandy 01 passed command to Sandy 11 flight, who bedded down the survivor for the night. Strikes were put into the pass area all night, and Nail FACs maintained constant radio contact with Ashcan 01. A-1's delivered BLU-52 onto the route structure during the period.

The first light effort was launched at 2310Z with Sandy 01 and Sandy 03 flights, and the same JG crews from the previous days in JG 30 (52) and JG 53. It was hoped that weather would permit an A-1 escorted pickup, but again, the ceilings were on the treetops. S01 showed S02 and S03 the survivor's general location, and Nail 07 again vectored JG 30 in for a doppler update. Sandy 01 made an attempt to fly over the survivor under the clouds, but was forced to turn around approximately 1500 meters west of his position. On egress, S01 encountered ground fire from the same location that had hit the Jolly the day before, and S01 silenced this fire with a rocket/20MM/7.62 pass.

JG30 again began the treetop search, and it became evident to Nail 07 and Sandy 01 that the original doppler fix was well south-some 1100 meters— of the survivor.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

JG30 therefore began working North, and discovered Ashcan 01 Bravo, whose body was hanging in his parachute. Because Ashcan 01 Alpha could hear the Jolly's rotor for the first time in the SAR, it was decided to move toward his position without attempting to recover Bravo. Alpha was located some 200 meters to the North, and a PJ brought him on board at approximately 0000Z. High winds prevented JG30 from turning around to the south, and a backwards hover movement was impossible due to the lack of visibility. Therefore, no further effort was made to recover Bravo's body.

This SAR saw remarkable assistance rendered to the Sandy/Jolly force by the Nails of the 23rd TASS. Their initial work in locating the survivor and their assistance to SO1 in communicating with Ashcan 01 was invaluable, as were the PAVENAIL contributions of Nail 01 in guiding aircraft to the survivor. Although serious problems were encountered in obtaining adequate area denial ordnance from BLUE CHIP, the Nails did succeed in saturating the pass area from Delta 29 to Delta 30 for the twelve hours between sunset and sunrise. Nail 49 continued to direct strikes during the first high effort. No SAMs were fired during the three hour pickup effort, indicating the probable effect of the night's strikes.

Any further SAR should include a request for a PAVENAIL, and the systems contribution increases with deteriorating weather. It should be noted that A-1 IFR delivery of BLU-52 is completely feasible using the PAVENAIL as lead-in.

The Ashcan 01 SAR saw a lot of teamwork and coordination, but its real success rest with two Jolly Greens who hovered unescorted in rugged terrain for almost seven hours. Visibilities during this period generally

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

included only the troops stationed below the helicopter. Only the lack of hostile inhabitants in the survivors area and the skill of the Jollys made rescue possible.

EDWARD R. JAYNE II, Capt, USAF  
Sandy 01

10 Dec

Sandy 1 - Jayne

Sandy 2 - Priebe

Sandy 3 - Encinas

Sandy 4 - Horklote

Sandy 9 - Bowden

Sandy 10 - Welton

Sandy 11 - Little

Sandy 12 - Faas

Sandy 07 - Burke

Sandy 08 - Fossum

Air Abort

11 Dec

Sandy 1 - Jayne

2 - Encinas

3 - Whaylen

4 - Throckmorton

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

1. Ashcan 01

(C) The first full body SAR of the rescue began on 30 December 1971. Ashcan 01, an F-105, was reported down in high karst just west of the center of Mu Gia Pass. He reported that his aircraft had been hit by a SAM and that he was on the ground with a broken arm and perhaps a broken leg.<sup>35</sup>

(C) A SAR was declared at 1025 local time and Sandy 01 and 02 were scrambled, as well as Jolly Greens 30, 31, 33, and 37. The Sandy launched at 1056 to provide escort for the Jolly Greens in the extremely high threat area of Mu Gia Pass. During this time, communications remained good with Ashcan 01 Alpha despite his injuries. He reported a solid low cloud deck in the area and no immediate enemy threat to his position.<sup>36</sup>

(C) Two OV-10s, Nail 49 and Nail 43, were in the area and had taken on-scene command after Ashcan 01 went down. They had located the approximate position of Ashcan 01 Alpha, and upon arrival of the Sandy flight they turned over on-scene command to Sandy 01. They then briefed the Sandy on local area conditions and the approximate position of the survivor. The A-1s proceeded to verify the location by flying low over the clouds and asking the survivor for notification when they were overhead. Sandy 01 then tried to reach the area of the survivor by flying under the clouds. He found that, while the clouds were at 500 feet over the treetops

35. SARCO Report for Ashcan 01, 13 Dec 71, (Dec 15).

36. Ibid.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~



10 Km away, they came down to working level at about 7 km from the best known position of the survivor. He was forced to pull up and go above the clouds again. The hazard of both low clouds and mountains made it quite obvious that the A-1s could not operate under the clouds with any degree of safety. The low level penetration by Sandy 01 did, however, substantiate the opinion that the high ground around the survivor was free of enemy activity.<sup>37</sup>

(6) A new concept in SAR operations was next explored. A Pave Nail, Nail 07, was led over the clouds by Sandy 01 to the best known position of Airborn 01 Alpha. The Pave Nail determined a very accurate LORAN position which, from that point forward, was used by the SAR forces. Jolly Green 52 came over the spot and adjusted its Doppler equipment to zero.<sup>38</sup>

(7) Jolly Greens 52 and 53, alternating one at a time, next began a search which lasted for seven hours either below, on, or above the clouds. They used Pave Nail 07 as an airborne COF site for directions to the survivor. At one point, while Jolly Green 52 and Sandy 01 were looking for a hole in the undercast near the survivor, they were tracked by a SAM site, and a SAM came up out of the clouds, passed directly under Jolly Green 52 towards Sandy 01. The SAM missed and then went back down into the clouds without detonating.<sup>39</sup>

(8) While searching under the clouds, Jolly Green 52 lowered a parachute and lowered a HC, but the chute proved to be from a spare

---

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

located three or four km. from the survivor. Various attempts were made to locate and identify the survivor. He was asked to activate one of his rockets and later to fire one of his gyro-jets, but these efforts were lost in the low clouds which prevailed throughout the day. The two Jolly Greens continued the search until darkness was near; the one searching while the other refueled. The Sandys and Jolly Greens were forced to call a halt to the search as darkness came. <sup>40</sup>

(C) Pave Nail FAC took over on-scene command in the evening and maintained communications with Ashcan 01 Alpha. Area denial ordnance was requested to saturate the Mu Gia Pass area during the night. Limited response was obtained to the requests in the early hours of the night but in the late hours numerous strikes were put in and around the pass. The use of AGU-52 was approved and it was dropped by A-1s along the route structure near the pass to deter the enemy. <sup>41</sup>

(C) A first light effort was planned using a force of four Sandys, four Jolly Greens, a Pave Nail FAC, and a Nail FAC. This force took off at about 0330 local and was in position at 0350 near the survivor, but again over an undercast which seemed to be much the same as the previous day. Sandy 01 tried again, as the day before, to locate Ashcan 01 Alpha by flying under the clouds. Again he was forced to turn around short of the objective when the clouds

---

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.



never dropped down to treetop level. In concentrated ground fire along the rim of Ma Oia Pass as he climbed out. The fire was not close to the survivor and Sandy 01 silenced it with rocket and gun firing passes.<sup>42</sup>

(3) A treetop search was again started, this time by Jolly Green 30. Through cross checking known information, it became evident that an adjustment to the suspected position of the objective was necessary. The search was adjusted to a point 1700 meters further to the north. At that point the parachute and body of Ashcan 01 Bravo was discovered in a tree. Thus, the reason why the SAR forces had had no communications with Bravo was clarified. Due to the treetop cloud conditions which made helicopter operations extremely hazardous, a decision was made to move forward to recover the living crewmember. Ashcan 01 Alpha was located about 200 meters to the north and a PJ brought him on board Jolly Green 30 at 0700 local. Wind and cloud conditions made it impossible to recover the body of Bravo. Visibility was limited to only those treetops immediately below the helicopter in the area of the survivor. After the recovery of Alpha all SAR forces returned to HRP, and at 0745 on 11 December 1971 the SAR was terminated.<sup>43</sup>

---

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

[REDACTED]

more difficult than the others, were unusual for some reason, or resulted in proposed changes in concepts and tactics.

#### Ashcan 01

On the morning of 10 December 1971, Ashcan 01, an F-105G out of Korat RTAFB, was downed by a SAM in the Mu Gia Pass. The pilot, Major Robert E. Belli, had received launch indications and had started evasive action when his aircraft was hit. The aircraft went immediately out of control and Major Belli called for the backseater to get out while he (Major Belli) went for his ejection handles. Major Belli recalled that the negative "G" forces made it almost impossible to reach the handles, but "I do remember finally grabbing them. And that's all I do remember until I woke up on the ground." <sup>65/</sup>

Major Belli's impact with the trees was so great that his parachute was torn in half and he was completely separated from the shroud lines. When he awoke, approximately 15 minutes after his ejection, he discovered that he had a badly broken arm and a dislocated knee. The injuries immobilized him and, in his own words, "I knew that I was going to stay right there until either they rescued me or something else happened." <sup>66/</sup>

Word was received at NKP on Ashcan 01's plight at 1027, and the Jolly Greens were scrambled with Jolly Green 52 to act as low aircraft. When the Jolly Greens arrived at the scene, it was learned that neither the OV-10 Nail FAC nor the Sandy had been able to locate the survivor due to poor weather. In the immediate area of the survivor, the weather was completely



~~SECRET~~

overcast with bases of the clouds extending to the ground. Winds were from the northeast, gusting to over 30 knots. <sup>67/</sup>

Jolly Green 52 located a hole in the clouds about three miles southwest of the survivor and descended below the overcast. Each attempt to head north toward the survivor was met with a wall of clouds and on many occasions, while looking for a clear route, the helicopter was forced to climb up through the clouds. Attempts from the north were barred by 6,000-foot mountains, while the ridge that the survivor was on precluded attempts from the west. <sup>68/</sup>

At one time, a SAM passed within 200 feet of Jolly Green 52 and on four other occasions, the Jolly received hits from automatic groundfire after drifting over Mu Gia Pass. Another flight of Jolly Greens arrived in the area and became the target for several SAM firings. As the afternoon progressed, weather conditions worsened in the area and it was decided at 1730 to call off the SAR effort for the day. Sandy gave Ashcan 01 bed-down instructions and insured him that the SARTF would be back first thing the next morning. With the weather and the approaching darkness, the survivor allowed that there was not much that could be done about it and he settled down for the night awaiting first light. <sup>69/</sup>

The Sandys and the Jollys held a meeting at NKP that night to discuss the best method of operation for the next day's effort. It was determined at that time that there just was no better way to do it except wait for the weather to improve. Later that night, however, Major Kenneth Ernest, the

[REDACTED]

pilot of Jolly Green 52 scheduled for the Jolly Green Low position the following morning, called a meeting of his crew to brief a tactic that had never been tried before. Major Ernest told the author: <sup>70/</sup>

*We just decided to go in in the weather--in a hover right on the trees. Everyone was briefed on just how I wanted our position passed. We knew at times that there would just be one person who would have sight of a tree, and everybody else would be IFR and I would just fly on that one person. If someone sighted something on one side of the airplane or in the rear he would say "clear" in that area. That would mean he had something in sight then he would start giving "move left five feet" and I'd have my eyes out front hoping I could catch something. And then we would leap to it and wait for something else to clear in front and then leap to that tree.*

The SARTF arrived back on the scene at 0545, 11 December, and awaited first light. Major Ernest's crew in Jolly Green 30 (Jolly Low) secured a doppler fix from over the survivor's position to aid in returning to him and, since the weather was about the same as the day before, Jolly Green 30 descended through a hole in the clouds and began searching. Beginning his run-in to Ashcan 01 from about two miles southwest, Major Ernest was IFR and required assistance in locating the survivor. The assistance was provided by a Sandy and a Pave Nail. The Sandy orbited behind the Jolly Green and provided headings for the Jolly through direction finder cuts with the survivor. The Pave Nail orbited 90 degrees off the Jolly's track and monitored the angle between DF cuts on the survivor and on the Jolly. <sup>71/</sup>



**SECRET**

In this manner, Jolly Green 30 slowly made its way from tree to tree toward Ashcan 01 Alpha. Along the way, the parachute of Ashcan 01 Bravo (the backseater) was discovered. A flight surgeon aboard Jolly Green 30 determined that the man (who had by then been hanging in his parachute harness for over 20 hours, suspended in a tree, with the wind causing him to swing against the tree trunk) was not alive. An unenviable decision had to be made at that time by Major Ernest. To retrieve the body would require lowering a PJ on Jolly Green 30's only penetrator. With the gusting winds making the helicopter difficult to control, this meant risking the life of the PJ and losing the penetrator. Without the penetrator the mission would have to be aborted, and with Ashcan 01 Alpha calling out that he was just a short distance away, Major Ernest elected to continue to the survivor. In discussing the decision he made, Major Ernest recalled thinking: <sup>72/</sup>

*. . . What happens if I lower the PJ down there-- we only have one penetrator. . . what happens if I get him or the penetrator stuck down there in the trees? We would have to abort the whole mission because we wouldn't have a penetrator to pick up Alpha. That's one thing--also risking the life of the PJ going after a dead man, that's the second thing. Also--here's a live man. Let's get him. Let's get him right now.*

The coordination between the Jolly, the Pave Nail, and the Sandy resumed as Jolly Green 30 continued to inch its way toward Alpha until a hover was established over Major Belli. Approximately one hour had been spent in mostly IFR weather for Jolly Green 30 to move the two miles or so to Ashcan 01 Alpha. Major Belli described the pickup from his vantage point on the ground: <sup>73/</sup>