

1429	26 Dec 1971	F-4D	NVN	Stolz L. G.	Capt	KIA		Koons D F.	1Lt	KIA
1430	26 Dec 1971	OV-10A	LAOS	Guenther L. E.	Capt	POW (returned)				
1431	31 Dec 1971	F-4D	LAOS	Duggan W. Y.	Maj	KIA		Sutter F. J.	Capt	MIA
1432	20 Jan 1972	RF-4C	LAOS	u	u	Rescued	AA Helo	u	u	Rescued
1433	20 Jan 1972	F-4E	LAOS	Davis O. J. Jr	Capt	Rescued	Army Helo	Venables R. K.	Capt	Rescued
1434	10 Feb 1972	F-4E	LAOS	Murphy J. S.	Capt	Rescued		Dobson T. W.	1Lt	Rescued
1435	16 Feb 1972	F-4D	Sea	Schwertfeger W. R.	Capt	POW (returned)		Galati R. W.	1Lt	POW (retur
1436	17 Feb 1972	O-2	u	Christy R. W.	1Lt	KIA		Silva W. E.	SSgt	Rescued
1437	17 Feb 1972	F-105G	Sea	Cutter J. D.	Capt	POW (returned)		Fraser K. J.	Capt	POW (retur
1438	17 Feb 1972	F-4	NVN	Irwin R. H.	Maj	MIA		Hawley E. A.	Capt	POW (retur
1439	2 Mar 1972	OV-10A	LAOS	Long M. H.	Capt	Rescued				
1440	6 Mar 1972	F-4E	LAOS	Howell C. A.	1Lt	KIA		Rusch S. A.	1Lt	MIA
1441	14 Mar 1972	OV-10A	LAOS	Hardy A. H.	1Lt	MIA				
1442	18 Mar 1972	OV-10A	LAOS	Breskman D. G.	1Lt	Rescued	USAF Helo	Boretsky S. L.	Capt	Rescued
1443	18 Mar 1972	A-1J	LAOS	Faas M. J.	Capt	Rescued	AA Helo			
1444	23 Mar 1972	F-4D	LAOS	Whitt J. E.	Maj	KIA		Jackson J. T.	Capt	KIA
1445	28 Mar 1972	AC-130A	LAOS	Ramsower I. B.	Maj	MIA		Wanzel C. J.	1Lt	MIA
1446	30 Mar 1972	C-130E	LAOS	Fulk W. O.	Capt	Rescued		Bolling E. N.	Capt	Rescued
1447	2 Apr 1972	O-2A	Sea	Abbot R. L.	1Lt	Rescued	USN			
1448	2 Apr 1972	EB-66C	SVN	Bolte W. L.	Maj	MIA		Hambleton I. E.	LtCol	Rescued
1449	3 Apr 1972	OV-10A	SVN	Henderson W. J.	1Lt	POW (returned)		Clark M. N.	1Lt	Rescued
1450	7 Apr 1972	OV-10A	SVN	Walker B. C.	1Lt	MIA		Potts L. F.	1Lt2	MIA
1451	9 Apr 1972	F-4D	LAOS	Banks W. M. Jr	Capt	Rescued		Jacobs M. J.	Capt	Rescued
1452	15 Apr 1972	F-4E	NVN	Trimble L. A.	1Lt	KIA		Despiegler G. A.	Maj	POW (retur

Air America- 18 March 1972- Laos

RESCUE By Ben A. Van Etten

There are certain dates in a lifetime of events that stay etched in your memory. I can vividly remember, for example, my wedding day, where I was the day that JFK was assassinated, and other events important to my family. Another time was the 18th of March 1972.

I was the pilot on an H-34D helicopter for Air America, Inc. It started as a routine flight from Udorn, Thailand to Pakse, Laos. My passengers were mainly flight crews "dead heading" up country for a crew rotation. I was scheduled to remain six days in Pakse. "King" was the call sign of the Air Force airborne controller for search and rescue (SAR) missions in Laos. I was about ten minutes from landing for refueling in Savanaket, Laos when "King" broadcasted a

message for "any Air America helicopter in the Savanaket area that might be available to help rescue a downed pilot."

Normally the military took care of their own SAR's, but Air America made many rescues simply because we were in the area. Some times the Air Force was its own worst enemy because by the time birds were scrambled, briefed, cover provided, MIG cap provided, and authentication

of the downed pilot (as if the enemy would stage a fake crash) were made, he'd probably be captured. On two other occasions I'd picked up a downed crew, moved them to a safe area, and finally the military would make their pick up. I responded that I could be available, after refueling.

I was given a radio frequency to contact "Sandy one" once I was back in the air. He would be the on scene commander directing the rescue operation. The downed aircraft was an OV-10 forward air controller (FAC) out of Vietnam. It had been shot down by AA over route twenty three (part of the Ho Chi Min Trail) about 40 miles east of Savanaket. The crew was hiding on the east side of the "road," which was alive with massive AA activity, and a quick pickup could avert certain capture by the NVA.

I contacted "Sandy one" shortly after takeoff and was advised to head east to route twenty three and take up an orbit, but don't cross the road.

"Hotel 70", my call sign, "Rogers." Sandy one and Sandy two were a flight of A1E Sky Raiders and normally escort the CH53 (Jolly Green Giant) rescue helicopters.

As I flew closer to the area I could hear Sandy one talking to the downed pilot over the UHF guard frequency. He was OK, but the NVA soldiers were starting to look for him.

I might add at this point that March is the height of the "smoky" season when the farmers in that part of the world slash and burn, clearing areas of the jungle for planting the next season's crops. Visibility on that day, because of the smoke, was down to about one mile with no ceiling.

I flew up to route twenty three and began an orbit when I called Sandy with my position. I also requested the coordinates of the downed airman, which he refused to pass. "Besides," he said, "the Jollies were on the way and would be making the pickup."

That was just fine with me and my crew. We didn't relish the idea of flying through 37mm AA, not to mention the 23mm and 12.7's that were reported in the area.

Finally, I heard the Jollies call Sandy with an ETA of fifteen minutes. Sandy replied with "continue inbound while I descend toward the target to get a visual on the downed pilot."

A few seconds later Sandy's wing man reported ground fire directed toward Sandy one. Sandy

replied with "Roger, I heard the shots, but didn't take any hits." Even though I was only a mile or so away from the pickup point, I had yet to see the Sandies because of the smoke.

The next radio transmission was from one of the Jollies saying with a nervous sounding voice that he needed to RTB (return to base) because of a fluctuating gauge (probably his blood pressure). Number two came back with "I'm right behind you." He sounded relieved.

I called Sandy again and requested the coordinates. He was going to make another pass over the area and would get back to me. Again Sandy two broadcasted "You're receiving fire." Sandy one answered, "I've been hit and I'm on fire!" I interjected at that point to turn to 270 before bailing out. "Negative, I'm heading south and ejecting right now!" Obviously, I wanted him to head west toward us and bail out on the west side of route twenty three. We hadn't had a visual on him yet. As he was making his last transmission I turned the UHF homing switch that showed his position from us as 080. I was orbiting at 3000 feet and nosed over to descend to tree top level, before crossing the road.

The other two crew members (Captain B.J. Ruck, my co-pilot, and Flight Mechanic Jim Nakamoto) both agreed to go on with the rescue. There was no doubt that this one could definitely turn into a "rotten sandwich." We all needed to be on the same sheet of music.

Another Air America H34 crewed by Bill Johnson and Dave Ankerberg arrived as my backup and would remain in orbit west of the "trail" while I went in for the pickup.

We were low level with the wheels inches from the tree tops, heading 080, pulling lots of power, maintaining max air speed (above VNE, no doubt). When we crossed route nine, which seemed like a four-lane highway, we were exposed much longer than we'd anticipated.

It took about ten to fifteen seconds to cross! The "pucker factor" was also "red lined," but we never heard a shot! Back over the trees we breathed a bit easier.

Looking ahead through the smoke and haze we could see the fire and black smoke bellowing from Sandy's wreckage. I turned a few degrees left figuring that the plane probably flew on for a few seconds after the pilot ejected.

About that time Sandy one called on his survival radio that he could hear us and that we were headed straight for him. I spotted his orange parachute and noted with some dismay that he was hanging about fifty feet up in a tree! I settled to a low hover over him for a hoist pickup with the jungle penetrator. Jim operated the hoist as I hovered the aircraft. B.J. had his Uzzi, loaded, on his lap, watching out the left side. (As if the Uzzi would do us much good against a squad of pissed off NVA soldiers with AK47's!) Sandy two was in a tight orbit over us. We felt good about that, those A1E's packed a lot of fire power! The pilot was looking up at us with a big grin as Jim worked the hoist to lower the penetrator. I was thinking it was a bit early for celebration, we had a long ways to go.

This particular hoist only had one speed, slow. It seemed to take forever for it to get to him.

Meanwhile, we were expecting the bad guys to come running out of the jungle with guns a blazing. Under the triple canopy the ground appeared open. Jim came over the intercom and advised us that our grinning pilot couldn't reach the penetrator! Jim was trying to swing it to him, but because of the dense tree foliage, it wasn't happening. About that time we heard the first round explode above us! I'm not sure if "Charley" was shooting at our cover A1E or was trying to lob an air burst at us. Anyway, times were a bit tense.

We retrieved the hoist while the pilot was able to rappel to the ground, unhook from his survival pack, and move to a more open area. We moved over him again, lowered the penetrator, he hooked up and we began the extraction. A second explosion was heard overhead. It sounded close! To add to our concerns, the 30 minute low fuel light had been

illuminated for approximately 20 minutes. We finally got him into the aircraft and figured that we'd been hovering there for 34 minutes! Luck was with us, the bad guys were still a no show.

I gave "King" a call to let him know we had "Sandy one" on board and were heading out.

King advised us not to re-cross in that area, but to head south and cross the road near the town of Saravan where it was safer. Unfortunately we were too low on fuel to go far. If we were going to run out of gas, the west side of the road was our best option. I advised "King" that we'd have to cross at the same area where we came in. I'd radioed to have a drum of fuel brought out. After crossing route twenty three (again without incident) we rendezvoused with the other chopper, landed in a field, and hand pumped 55 gallons of gas into what must have been only fumes left in the tank.

While we were refueling, we were all feeling pretty good about saving the downed pilot, but mainly we were glad to still be alive. Being the nice guy I am, I decided to have a little fun with the pilot. There was a rumor going around (with the Air Force) that Air America crews received a \$10,000 bonus when we recovered a downed airman. Not true. I got with the pilot and told him that we wouldn't be taking him directly back to his base (NKP, Thailand) and would be going on to

Pakse. Of course at that point anything I said would have been fine with him. I further explained that he was worth ten grand to me and my crew and we hadn't been paid for our last rescue. So we wanted to make sure we turned him over to the right person to get credit for the bonus. He bought it all, hook, line and sinker.

With in an hour we landed at the Pakse Airport, turned the happy pilot over to his Air Force representative, and reported in to our "customer," Jim Butler. Jim (call sign "Grey Fox") told us to assemble in the briefing room. We had a mission (exfill) in the Bolivans plateau. Another hot one to finish out the day, 18 March 1972.