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E&E TIPS

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EVASION AND RECOVERY OF NAIL-31

On 18 March 1972, 1Lt David G. Breskman, the aircraft commander of Nail-31, an OV-10, and Capt Steven L. Poretsky, weapon systems officer, were briefed for a routine Pave Nail mission in VP sectors 4A and 4B of STEEL TIGER. The pre-mission briefing covered recent AAA groundfire threat areas, enemy activity, the SAR posture, recommended SAFE Areas and immediate bailout areas, the E&E code letters and symbols, and code words.

After diverting to VP sector 6 to insert a Ploching Belt Nail-31 returned to VP sector 4A to cut fords in the area. Five strike aircraft were in the area to deliver ordnance under FAC control. The strike aircraft had already dropped their "dumb" bombs and were stacking for a "smart" bomb strike.

Lt Breskman described the emergency as follows:

"We had just gone in to mark the target for the strike flights when we took our hit. We were in the pull off near the 'Thumb' of the 'Catcher's mitt'. Our aircraft heading was 180 degrees, climbing at about 120 knots, with full power on both engines. We were passing between 2,500 and 3,000 feet when we took what I believe was a direct hit from 37mm. This was the first AAA reaction in the target area.

"I looked back over my right shoulder and saw the right side of the cargo bay and the right wing on fire; I think the right engine was also on fire. We nosed over about 30 degrees; the cockpit filled with smoke and the engine and flight systems seemed inoperative. The stick seemed to have free play and was not responding. All of a sudden the right wing fell off and we started to spin. All radios were dead; I wasn't able to contact any of the five aircraft overhead and couldn't squawk emergency IFF. Our briefed E&E area was 170 degrees for 17 nautical miles. We were going in the right direction, but I knew we couldn't make it. I couldn't contact the backseater on the intercom so I punched us both out."

Capt Poretsky described the emergency and ejection as follows:

"At the time we took the hit I had just unstowed my

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Equipment and started to acquire the target. I felt the hit and looked over my right shoulder. I saw it the windroot about a foot and a half back from the leading edge. I also saw two or three holes about four inches in diameter, three to four inches to the rear of the leading edge of the right wing between the engine and the fuselage. I immediately tried all five radios and the intercom; they were all dead. I reached for the ejection handle but was ejected by the pilot.

"My helmet was on, the chin strap fastened, and my visor up. I was sitting upright in the seat with my left hand in my lap and my right arm on the armrest. I felt no windblast and there was no apparent tumbling. The seat separated automatically. Although I remember leaving the aircraft, I don't remember anything until the chute opened automatically. I had the four-line cut ready but somehow the lines had been cut already. I activated the beeper on one of my radios in my vest but didn't take it out of the vest. We were being shot at during our descent. I saw AK-47, 12.7mm, twin barrel 23 and 37mm AAA fire.

"I was primarily concerned with the beeper as there were fighters overhead. They should have been able to see both the aircraft and our chutes go in. My descent lasted about three to five minutes; I got a good look at the terrain. I aimed for a lightly foliated area to the west toward the River. I didn't deploy the seatback. When I entered the trees my body was in the tree landing position. My chute caught in the trees and my feet were about four inches off the ground when I stopped.

"I suffered second degree burns on the back of my neck from either the hit or the ejection. I also sustained minor bruises on my right arm and right shoulder from the ejection but no injuries from the landing. I lost my helmet during the ejection sequence.

Lt Breskman described his ejection and descent as follows:

"At the time of bailout our airspeed was about 120 knots with the aircraft about 30 degrees nose down in a 60 degree right bank at about 7,300 feet. Because of aircraft vibrations I was thrown forward in the cockpit and was leaning over the stick when I punched out. My helmet was on; the chinstrap connected with the visor up. I didn't tumble and the chute opened instantaneously. There wasn't any windblast

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and I don't remember any opening shock; I got some chafe marks from the harness.

"My descent took about four to five minutes. I got a very good look at the terrain and it didn't look good. I knew the whole area was a lucrative target and I didn't think there was a safe place. The land was flat with parts heavily foliated. I directed my descent to the area with the most foliage and performed the fourline cut when I decided where I wanted to go. I had a beeper in my seatpack but it didn't come on because it was set on manual. I took my radio out on the way down, changed it from beeper to voice and told the fighter overhead to mark our position. I stowed the radio before I landed. My seatpack was on manual and it stayed closed. Prior to entering the trees I assumed what I thought was the position for a tree penetration parachute landing fall, but it turned out that I was in the water penetration PLF. I hung up momentarily in the trees just long enough for my chute to collapse, and then fell the last 15 feet to the ground. I sprained my right ankle when I hit the ground. The only thing I lost during the ejection was a pencil from my left pocket. All the equipment worked as advertised. I think my training duplicated the situation very well."

Lt Breshman described his initial actions on the ground as follows:

"As soon as I landed I released my parachute harness, abandoned my seatpack, took off my helmet and started walking. I could see a fairly good distance through the trees from my location. The trees were about four inches in diameter and very tall; there was no underbrush or hiding place in the immediate area. I went about 500 meters to the southeast before I stopped walking. I stood still among the trees for a while trying to figure out what to do. I don't remember trying to make radio contact while looking for a hiding place. I stood there awhile, then continued to move on in a southeasterly direction and sat down next to a large tree. I traveled about 600 meters from my parachute for two hours after my landing."

"I was sitting by the tree trying to figure out what to do when I heard someone coming. I looked behind me and at first saw two monkeys and then an enemy soldier carrying a machine gun coming towards me from the east. I took out my gun as he approached and sat very still hoping he would veer away from my position. He was dressed in a khaki uniform with a black belt. The uniform was very neat and looked as if it

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just been ironed. He had medium length black hair and wasn't wearing a hat. He kept coming toward me; I remained motionless. He looked in my direction a number of times but apparently didn't see me. He was within 10 feet of my position when I wheeled around and fired four times. I think I hit him with the first and last shots. The first one hit in the stomach and the last one hit him in the head. I thought he was dead but his gun was pointed right at me and his eyes were still open. I cautiously moved over to him and took his M-47. There was a lot of groundfire at this time and my shots apparently didn't attract attention. I didn't see anyone else.

"I began moving again to the southeast until I came to the hiding place I'd seen. The only problem was that it looked like a hiding place and we'd been told in training not to select an obvious hiding place. However, it was close to work, the area provided adequate cover, and I didn't want to sleep in the jungle at night. The hiding place was covered with vines and there was a pile of rotten logs. There was a space in the middle where I could lie down and be surrounded on all four sides by logs. The trees were about 200 feet high with a heavy canopy. I couldn't see very far from the hiding place and was sure I couldn't be seen. I kept the M-47 although I wasn't too sure how to use it. I finally decided that I could use it if I had to. It was on single shot, the way it was when I got it. I figured as long as the bolt was forward it was armed, just like an M-16. It was about four or five hours after I landed and I was about 200 meters southeast of my chute. I took my radio out and established contact with Nail-32 telling him my condition and that I had two radios and two spare batteries.

"When I first got on the ground I heard a whirring noise that sounded like machinery and told this to the people overhead. After awhile I became convinced it was some kind of insect since the sound was random.

"When the Sandies and the FACs arrived on scene I called out all the ground fire that I could hear or see. I also called out bearings from their rockets to my positions. There was a 12.7 or ZPU not more than 200 meters south of my position. I couldn't see the gun but I could see the tracers coming up out of the trees.

"As night approached I felt a little safer because it was very dark and I was certain no one would find me without a light. It was quiet in the jungle that night; the noises I heard were insects and falling leaves. I didn't see anyone come near my position. I was in constant contact

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with aircraft overhead and checked in every 15 minutes until dawn. I used my flasher with the IR filter on it to aid the Pave Nails and Spectre's to fix my position. However, they weren't able to see the flashes due to the foliage over my position. One problem with the flasher is that it leaks white light out the bottom and red light out the sides. I couldn't use the flasher and the radio together because I had to hold the bottom of the flasher against my survival vest and hold my hands around the sides."

"The Spectre's and Pave Nails did an excellent job delivering ordnance during the night. The closest ordnance drop came about 100 meters north of my position. That was all right with me; I told them to put it as close as they wanted. The strike flights were afraid to put in ordnance south of my position because they weren't sure of 'Bravo's' exact position. I think Spectre's 01 and 20 and Nail 16, 28, 55, and 20 all did an excellent job in providing us support that night.

"I began to think about what would happen if we couldn't get out. I had a sprained ankle and it was 100 miles to NKP. If I had to move I would go south to 'Tabletop' karst, our briefed E&F area. I was trying to decide how to do that. I had two flasks of water but I wasn't very thirsty. I was probably getting dehydrated but I didn't drink any water.

"The training I had was good as I can imagine getting; there's really no way you can train for every possible situation. I used quite a bit of the equipment and most of it functioned the way it was supposed to. I used the radios, compass, flasher, camouflage stick, and flares. I had some problem with the camouflage stick; it had melted and wouldn't come out of the metal tube until after it cooled off. The mosquitoes were biting but I didn't use the face netting because I wanted to be able to see as well as possible. I first used the radio I had in the left survival vest pocket. I wasn't sure if that one was working properly so I took the other one out. I used the second radio for about 16 hours on the same battery. The battery meter showed a full charge just before I was rescued. I was in constant contact with someone for the entire time I was on the ground and I stayed in the same hiding place until my rescue.

"A pickup was tried the day we were shot down but was aborted due to heavy groundfire. I hoped for a first light SAR but the area had to be neutralized further before a pickup could be attempted. Nail-01 was in contact with me most of the time and requested I come up on radio

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"every ten minutes. I heard 'Bravo's' beeper from time to time and reported it wasn't mine."

Capt Boretsky described his initial actions on the ground as follows:

"As soon as I got to the ground I stepped out off my chute. The terrain was flat and covered with three to four inches in diameter and six to ten feet high. There was very little thick underbrush, but there were a lot of vines and brambles. There were a 100 to 200 foot trees but these were few and far between. I left the chute and seatpack. I figured that in areas that flat and with visibility that good I'd better get away as fast as possible. I moved about 300 to 400 meters in a general northwest direction toward 'Alpha's' last sighted position.

"I moved about 400 meters, stopped and surveyed my equipment. I found that the antenna on one radio had been broken making it useless. I hadn't put the antenna back in when I descended into the trees. I broke the rest of the antenna off, removed the battery and buried the radio along with my pencil and other bright objects.

"I attempted to come up on my other survival radio but I heard a beeper on Guard frequency. I didn't try to override the beeper but periodically monitored my radio till the beeper went down. The beeper in my seatpack was on manual and didn't come on. I had no idea how long it was before I first started transmitting; my concept of time was distorted.

"I continued moving in a northwesterly direction looking for a good place to hide. An hour and a half after I left my chute, I found what appeared to be a decent hiding place. By this time the beeper had stopped and I made radio contact with a Covey. The hiding place I selected was on one side of a creekbed and consisted of two logs in a 'V'. They were about three feet in diameter and I could lie between them and couldn't be seen from any direction. The only problem was that the place was infested with a large group of red ants which bit me several times quite severely.

The Covey told me he had just been asked to leave the area because of congestion. We told me that he had my general area located. I told him I didn't have any injuries. I stayed in this area until the Sandies arrived.

The first Sandy to come in was Sandy-01 and he pinpointed my position. At this time I noticed that there was

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some AAA firing about 250 meters southeast of my position. Sandy-01 was hit during one of his passes and was forced to bailout. Because of the AAA fire in the area I decided to move to another location. I continued moving in the same direction trying to find a better hiding place but didn't see anything. I tried to reach the river to the northwest and toward Lt Breskman's position. Shortly after I made radio contact with the Covey I also made contact with the 'Alpha' on Guard. We told each other that we were all right, on the ground, and safe. At the time I wanted to go into the beeper cycle, but he suggested that since we had radio contact to stick with that instead. Sandy told me to go to Delta frequency and I did so with no results. I later found that I could only transmit on Delta frequency and couldn't receive. Several of the spare batteries I had would only operate for a few minutes. I got to where I only had one left.

"I applied the camouflage stick, inventoried my resources, took the E&E charts out and folded the appropriate one open to the general area we were in and oriented myself. After staying there for a little while, listening to the guns go off, I attempted to contact Sandy and tell him I was moving. Apparently they didn't receive this transmission. I moved to the northwest until about dusk, when I finally found a place to hide for the night. It turned out to be approximately 120 feet from a twin barreled 23mm AAA weapon and about 60 feet from a 37mm AAA weapon. I could see where the guns were firing from but couldn't see the guns themselves. The guns were firing tracerless ammunition. I attempted to pass this information to the aircraft in the area but received no answer.

"At one point I saw two of the gunners from the 37mm AAA pit as they ate their dinner and settled down for the night. One was dressed in a suit of black pajamas; the other wore medium gray trousers and a white shirt. Both guns were shut down at dusk and didn't open up again. I spent the night hidden between a log and a tree near the guns. I figured it would be better not to move that night. I dozed during the night waking up when trees and shrapnel fell around me and attempted to make radio contact. I would come up, start the beeper cycle, identify myself, and listen. I did this every 15 to 20 minutes. I didn't get an answer all night; I guess no one heard me. I tried to contact a Sandy that flew over me to tell him where I was but evidently I wasn't received. I made no movement at all at night. I wasn't familiar with the terrain and the large number of trees and branches on the ground made any movement quite impossible.

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found a hiding place and stayed there. During the night I heard several gunships working targets about 300 meters north of my position.

I got up shortly before sunrise and moved to a position slightly to the southeast. I found out later 'Alpha' and I were pretty close. I moved primarily to get away from the guns and closer to water. There were at least four gun pits around me through the first day; the second day I moved away from all but one.

"I was as well prepared as I could possibly be for an emergency situation. My survival training, E&F briefings, and pre-strike area briefings were of great assistance in my successful E&F and recovery."

Lt Breskman described the SAR operations as follows:

"They decided to go in and get 'Bravo' first and then 'Alpha'. I was all ready. I left the AK-47, a water bottle, a radio battery, and the marker panel packet. I left my parachute with the parachute. I stood up and had both flares ready to go. They were going for 'Bravo' first and I heard 'Bravo' say, 'OK Bravo, pop your smoke.' I heard 'Bravo' say, '180', or something like that. Then I thought I heard the Jolly say, 'OK, we got 'Bravo': pop your smoke 'Alpha'." I had to hold the radio in one hand and pop the smoke at the same time. I finally popped it and got a big whiff in my face before I turned around so it was downwind.

"The flare caught on fire and I had to hold it against a tree to put the fire out; it didn't seem to make much smoke then. I had already disconnected the flare from its safety line so I could drop it after it burned out. I didn't see the Jolly until he was right over me. He was at about 100 feet when they started to let the penetrator down. When the Jolly came overhead I couldn't even hear myself: I was yelling into the radio that he was right over me.

"When the PJ I'd asked for started down on the penetrator, I left everything on the ground, put my radio inside my vest, and started over to where I thought he was going to land. I got there about the same time the PJ landed and he asked me to get on the penetrator. The first thing I did was to unhook the strap out of the penetrator and put it on, then I crawled about the seat. I wrapped my arms around the penetrator and didn't do anything after that; I just waited until I was in the helicopter.

We had trouble going through the canopy on the way up.

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My knife and pistol were ripped away by tree limbs. Since I didn't have my helmet, the PJ protected my head with his hands. We got in the Jolly without any trouble. I got off the penetrator and sat on one of the stretchers. I'd been thoroughly briefed by the Sandy about what would happen, but I was surprised when I didn't see 'Bravo' in the Jolly.

"I know we went down in one of the worst areas in STEEL TIGER. The fact they were able to rescue us from that area speaks highly of the SAP team. I feel that everyone involved did a very fine job. The first day they saw it was too hostile to make a recovery so they abandoned the attempt. They didn't abandon us: they waited until they had everything subdued to a point where they could handle it before they came in to get us out. They did it just right. I thought all the people involved did the right thing."

Capt Boretsky described the SAP effort as follows:

"Shortly after dawn when one of the Sandies made a low pass right over my head I was able to contact and receive on Delta frequency. He told me to go to Alpha frequency. I knew generally what was going to be happening through the entire operation. I also knew that they did not have my exact location. When the Jollies came in, Sandy called for me to pop my smoke. The smoke didn't start until about 10 seconds after I pulled the cap. By the time it started the Jolly had gone overhead. He came back around and the PJ was down on the penetrator. Evidently he was picking 'Alpha' up at this time. The Jolly picked him up and the Sandy called for me to pop my second smoke. I popped it and the PJ was on the penetrator. I put both arms through the straps: we pulled the seat down together, and I climbed on. I put my head to the left side of the penetrator and kept it as close to the PJ as I could since I didn't have my helmet. I wrapped both arms around the PJ: he put both arms around my head and shoulders and held on. We went up about 100 feet and stopped, evidently to clear some trees. We went up about 40 more feet and stopped again. The Jolly must've been right above the tree tops. We went straight up to the Jolly. I waited until they pulled me inside and told me to get off. I hadn't asked for a PJ to help me, evidently there was some misunderstanding between me and 'Alpha' who'd asked for one because of his ankle.

I had contact on Guard with the recovery helicopter. Like 'Alpha' I had trouble hearing the Jolly pilot when he got close. I found out I needed about two more sets of hands in order to be able to keep the compass handy, operate the radio and pop my smoke at the right time. I also had my pistol out, and as a result, I left the pistol on the ground

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my haste to get on the penetrator. The only thing I left on the ground was one survival radio (the one I buried), my pistol, and the two night ends of the flares. I brought back everything else."

Lt Breskman had the following comment concerning the acoustic coupler for the radio:

"When I fly at night I always put the acoustical coupler on my radio before I leave. I don't do that on day missions. When I put it on during the recovery I was in a hurry and consequently lost it sometime and didn't have it when I needed it. I recommend each crew member put the acoustical coupler on the radio and leave it on."

Capt Boretsky had the following comments concerning his experience:

"My biggest problem when I got on the ground was the inability of my remaining radio to operate on Delta frequency. In the case where there is more than one member on the ground during a rescue attempt it would be a good idea to assign separate frequencies to each crew member. This would avoid confusion as to which crew member was to do what and when. I agree it would be a good idea to fit the acoustical coupler to one radio and the electronic coupler to the ear-piece or to the other radio. The acoustical coupler should be taped to the radio and not left in a separate package. You shouldn't have to worry about losing them. My acoustical coupler worked well if I could free a hand to hold it down tight. It seemed like the elastic would work its way loose. Whenever I used it, it worked well as long as I could hold it down over the transmitter."

"I was wearing my .38 in a belt holster and experienced no difficulty with it coming down in the chute or moving around on the ground. I was extremely happy about the way everything went. Who wouldn't be? I wasn't upset with anything. I realized very soon into the rescue operation that the SAR forces didn't know where I was. I was doing all I could to get where they could find me and to get away from the gun positions. As it was, Lt Breskman and I ended up pretty close to each other. The amount, accuracy, and precision delivered by the SAR forces was outstanding."

"I highly recommend that crew members carry three water bottles. If you wear your .38 in a belt holster, convert the first holster into a pocket for another water bottle."

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