

3Apr72 Nail 38

By Byron Hukee

As you read this HEADLINE in Pacific STARS us STRIPES, keep in mind, the combat aircrews I've interviewed who were in-theater at that time WERE NOT informed by 7th Air Force Intelligence that North Vietnam had 'invaded' South Vietnam ...until circa ~5 April 1972 (a week into the 1972 Easter Offensive) Chiến dịch Xuân hè 1972.

Combatant pilots, such as A-1 Skyraider Capt Don Morse (Bat 21 SAR-OSC) were surprised and caught off-guard by the density/lethality of PAVN AAA/SAM activity over Lt Col Iceal Hambleton's E&E position in northern Military Region 1, below the DMZ. This lack of aircrew G-2 briefing contributed to the shootdown on this date of OV-10A 'Nail 38' (Alpha-POW, Bravo-rescued) and nearly got Morse killed the following day (4 April 1972).

Had these aircrews had access to a copy of Pacific STARS us STRIPES, they would have more 'situational awareness' than provided from their formal 7th AF/IN professionals.

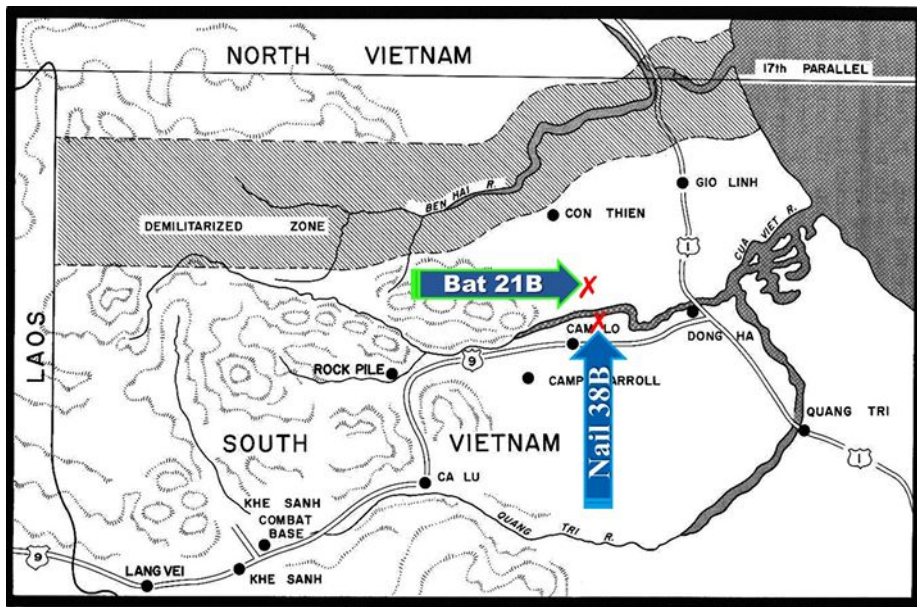
By Bob Laymon

Monday, 3 April 1972: Nail 38 led Jolly 65 down through the clouds to attempt the rescue of Lt Col Hambleton, call sign BAT 21 Bravo. Nail 38, an OV-10A from the 23rd TASS at NKP was equipped with electronic gear enabling its crew to get a rapid "fix" on its rescue target.

However, Nail 38 was subsequently shotdown that day by a PAVN SA-2 SAM (loss coordinates: 16.5022N / 107.0455E). The crew, Capt William J. Henderson, pilot and 1st Lt Mark N. Clark, navigator both successfully ejected and parachuted down behind enemy lines.

Clark landed on the south bank of the Mieu Giang River, 2 km southeast of BAT 21B's position. Clark evaded capture for 8 days and was subsequently rescued by USN SEAL LT Tom Norris.

Henderson landed with injuries on the north side of the Mieu Giang River and was subsequently captured eight hours later by occupying NVA forces. Henderson became a POW until being released by North Vietnam on 27 March 1973.



Lt Col Don Sutton, USAF (Ret.) by Bob Laymon

Then Capt Don Sutton was assigned as an HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant pilot with the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, Da Nang AB, RVN (a.k.a. "Rocket City") from August 1971 to July 1972.

Capt Sutton completed his tour of duty and departed Vietnam on 31 July 1972 when a space became available for rotation (rather than on 1 August, the 12th calendar month of his SEA tour).

Young Capt Sutton simply didn't care about missing out on the one month of hostile-fire "combat pay" at that time. His war was over.

When Sutton DEROSSED, he went to Det. 15 at Patrick AFB, FL again in HH-53s and stood alert as 'launch abort recovery' for Apollo 17 and Skylab space missions. Sutton also flew C-5s and C-141s during active duty, as well as becoming an acquisition program manager during the last 5 or 6 years of his AF career. He retired in New England.

While in Vietnam, Capt Sutton logged around 300 combat hours in the HH-53 Jolly Green. He flew a number of SAR efforts, the most famous being BAT 21, and as aircraft commander (AC) on the 4th (and last) Jolly Green to enter the Quang Tri Citadel on Monday, 1 May 1972 to evacuate Americans and Vietnamese who had been surrounded by enemy forces during the Eastertide thrust into Military Region I.

Capt Sutton was involved in a number of SARs, some successful and others not. They had several SAR efforts from Nov 1971 to Mar 1972, including the loss of one of their Jolly's and most of the crew in the Mekong Delta (they were deployed to Ben Hoa AB). AC-130A s.n. 55-0043 call sign "Spectre 11" was shot down by an SA-7 in the A Shau Valley on Sunday, 18 June 1972 (Lt Col Crawford O. Shockley & Capt Larry Henry was flying F-4E escort). The following day, Capt Sutton & crew rescued the only three survivors: Capt Gordon Boucher, 2nd Lt Robert Reid, and SSgt William B. Patterson.

Sutton was the HH-53 AC on another mission to rescue a Navy F-8 Crusader pilot, down in western RVN, but during their hover and hoist, his flight engineer was hit and the helicopter lost hydraulics to the hoist (due to battle damage) so they couldn't continue with the rescue attempt. The Navy F-8 pilot was rescued later. Another Sutton SAR was the rescue of an OV-10 crew who made an emergency landing on the beach near the hotly contested DMZ.

In a note Lt Col Sutton sent me, he confessed: "But I have to admit, I was a basket-case when I left Vietnam in August 1972. I was sure "they" had my number."



Capt Don Sutton, Jolly 65 Bravo -- In his own words:

It was 3 April 1972 that we made our rescue attempt. Bat-21B went down the previous day on the 2nd of April. LCDR Jay Crowe, U.S. Coast Guard and I were Alpha Low for April 3rd, which meant that we were going to be the first rescue attempt for Lt Col Hambleton. I can't remember how long we orbited before making the run in. Darrell Whitcomb's research says that it was about 9:30am, I think. There were a lot of clouds over the area, so we didn't see much until we started to descend. The Nail FAC (turns out that it was Nail 38, also shotdown later that day with Capt Bill Henderson & 1st Lt Mark Clark) led us down through the clouds. We didn't get below the clouds by much (can't remember the altitude, but probably 2,000 feet, or so) before we started taking AAA hits.

As the copilot, my responsibility was to ride the flight controls in case of injury to the AC and to monitor the cockpit instruments. I looked outside a little, but really concentrated on what was happening in the cockpit. Outside, I could see a convoy of tanks that we were flying right into. Inside, annunciator lights started going on and I called out what they were, etc. We lost one hydraulic system and then started losing instruments.

Jay was trying to stop the helicopter's descent and get going back into the clouds. His instruments were gone and he told me to take control of the aircraft, which I did. We were also losing hydraulic pressure on #1 system which was the primary for the main rotor and backup for the tail rotor (we had already lost #3 hydraulic system which was primary for tail rotor).

I noticed right away that I had to have the left rudder pedal all the way depressed to keep us flying somewhat straight. As it turned out, Jay and I both had to keep the rudder pedal depressed, because neither of us could do it alone. We had just enough hydraulic pressure on the tail rotor to keep us from spinning. We got back up in the clouds and the enemy hits stopped. When we got above the clouds, we made sure everybody was OK and did a battle damage assessment and controllability assessment. We weren't sure whether we would have to bail out or not, but prepared the crew to do so, if necessary.

We flew back to Hue-Phu Bai AAF and made a run-on landing on the Phu Bai taxiway. We could never have hovered due to the hydraulic system problems. As we touched down, we saw a crater in the taxiway (122mm rocket damage) that we were headed for and had to jerk the airplane up and over it. That was a little tough because of the hydraulic issues. When we pulled up on the collective, we couldn't keep it straight, but got it squared away on the other side of the crater. We rolled to a stop and took some very deep breaths.

I can't remember whether it was Alpha High who followed us in to Hue-Phu Bai and took us back to Da Nang, but we left the plane there for maintenance. Maintenance made some quick fixes to the hydraulic lines, and filled it with MIL-H-5606 fluid. Another crew flew it back to Da Nang later that day, I believe.

We were part of the history of the BAT-21B SAR effort, but the real heroes are the six soles who lost their lives a couple of days later during the shutdown of Jolly Green 67.

I found out that Jay Crowe had died in 2003. He and I met in Boston, probably in 2000 or so and had a really nice conversation and catch up on old times. He was a really good guy and a great pilot. He taught me a lot about rescue.

