



Today in SEA History

Tuesday - 4 April 1972

***"MAYDAY - MAYDAY - MAYDAY,
Sandy 05
...I'm hit! ...I'm Hit!"***

Background: BAT 21 Bravo was the call sign of Lt Col Iceal "Gene" Hambleton, an EB-66C navigator flying on his 63rd combat mission, an electronic path-finder mission escorting a B-52D three-ship cell (call sign "Copper") attacking NVA armor massed northwest of the abandoned ARVN base at Fire Base Fuller and Camp Carol in Military Region One (MR I).



Figure 1 Lt Col Iceal “Gene” Hambleton

Credit: Official USAF photo, 1972 Easter Invasion Lavalle

Hambleton served in the USAF during the last years of World War II without seeing any combat. During the Korean War, he flew 43 sorties as navigator in a B-29 Superfortress. He then worked during the 1960's on various USAF ballistic missile projects such as the PGM-19 Jupiter, Titan I ICBM and Titan II ICBM. Recalled to active service by the USAF, he was assigned to the 42nd Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron (TEWS) in Korat RTAFB, Thailand. 42nd squadron was equipped with EB-66C/Es that flew radar and communications jamming missions to disrupt enemy defenses and early warning capabilities.

Hambleton's EB-66C, s.n. 54-0466, 42nd TEWS, Korat RTAFB had been shotdown by a North Vietnamese SA-2 missile on Easter Sunday, 2 April 1972, south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in the area of Cam Lo (N16.50 - E107.01) on the north side of the Mieu Giang River. Hambleton would spend eleven and a half days behind enemy lines until being rescued by USN Seal, LT Tom Norris, MACSOG-80 and Vietnamese sea commando Petty Officer Nguyễn Văn Kiệt.



Figure 2 EB-66C, 42nd TEWS, Korat RTAFB

Credit: NMUSAF

Another survivor on the ground at that time was 1st Lt Mark N. Clark (Nail 38 Bravo) 23rd TASS, Nakhon Phanom RTAFB who was shotdown in his Pave Nail OV-10A s.n. 68-3789 over enemy territory on Monday, 3 April 1972, while supporting the BAT 21B SAR effort. Clark escaped and evaded capture on the south bank of the Mieu Giang River, 2 km southeast of BAT 21B's position, until being rescued by LT Norris on Tuesday, 11 April 1972.

Clark's OV-10A pilot, Capt Bill Henderson (Nail 38 Alpha) ejected successfully; however, landed with injuries on the north side of the Mieu Giang River and was captured by NVA forces. Henderson became a POW until being released by North Vietnam in 1973.

On Friday, 7 April 1972 another Airman was shotdown by an NVA SAM and was the third survivor on the ground a few kilometers northwest of Dong Ha (~ six kilometers northeast of BAT 21B's location). 1st Lt Bruce Walker, OV-10A pilot (call-sign Covey 282 Alpha, s.n. 68-3820) 20th TASS, Da Nang AB, RVN was communicating with overhead FACs as he was E&Eing towards the northeast in hope of an eventual beach rescue, along the southern buffer zone of the DMZ, northeast of Dong Ha. However, 11 days later on Tuesday, 18 April 1972 a Viet Cong cadre tracked Walker down northeast of Dong Ha (in the sand dunes, relatively near his beach objective) and killed him. The OV-10's backseat artillery spotter, 1st Lt Larry Potts, USMC, Covey 282-B, was MIA-BNR.

Lead-in: *An O-2A Skymaster pilot, 1st Lt Bill Jankowski (call sign Bilk 34) 20th TASS, Da Nang AB, RVN was an eyewitness to the shootdown of EB-66C, call sign BAT 21. By circumstances and fate, Jankowski became the first (in a series) "On Scene Commander" during the SAR effort for BAT 21B, including another O-2A FAC, Capt Harry Icke, Bilk 11.*



Figure 3 Capt Harry Icke Call sign – Bilk 11 in his Pleiku BOQ, prior to PCS to Da Nang

(Credit: Harry Icke)

Nearby, a search-and-rescue (SAR) force consisting of a Lockheed HC-130P command-and-control aircraft (call sign King 22), Sikorsky HH-53Cs (call sign

Jolly Green 65 & 67) long-range rescue helicopters and a force of 10 Douglas A-1 Skyraiders (call sign Sandy) were orbiting east of Quang Tri. The Sandy flight "lead" was Capt Don Morse (a.k.a. Tango Mike). Fate would also have Morse become the next On Scene Commander for the initial few days of the BAT 21B SAR effort ...and the subject of this paper.



Figure 4

Captain Richard M. Atchison in front of his OV-10 FAC aircraft.

Just as they started to turn, they caught it right in the tail booms. Blew that OV-10 to pieces. Just a tumbling ball of fire, sailing down to the river. Two chutes came out of the fireball—beautiful. Mark landed south of the river, south and east of Hambleton.

Henderson landed north in a big field—within 500 meters of Bat-21. Henderson told me after his release that ten or fifteen people came out of the woods and chased him. He found a clump of bamboo and jumped in—they couldn't find him. That night a group came out and started cutting down the bamboo. They used it for camouflage. They worked right over Bill's shelter. He doubled up with machetes going over his head. They cut all of his bamboo down—he was then taken north.

Mark found a barbed wire enclosed area—figured it was a good place to hide. He crawled under the wire. We worked the whole area over with Loran weapon deliveries—then the clouds broke and we worked the fighters visually.

The following is the story of Tango Mike's catastrophic battle damage and subsequent crash landing at Da Nang.

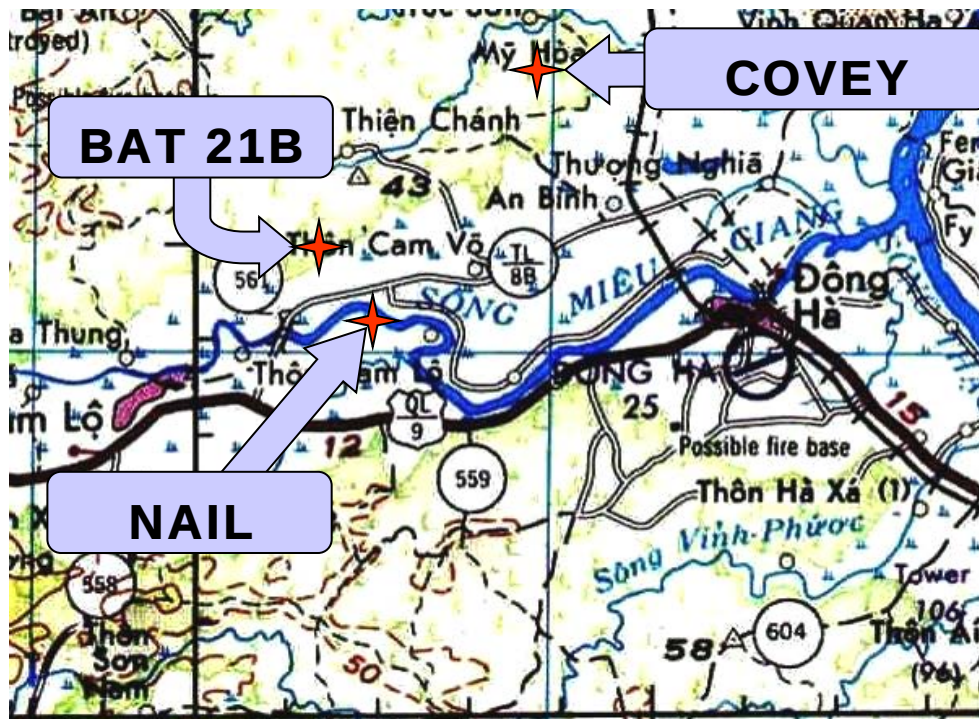


Figure 5 BAT 21B, NAIL 38B, and COVEY 282A relative E&E positions

Background map used with the permission of George G. Neville, Jr, Florence, Montana



Figure 6 Single-seat A-1H Skyraider s.n 139-780 with typical Sandy SAR weapons load, Da Nang Det. 1 Sandy alert revetment.

*Photo used with the permission of Lt Col (Ret.) Byron "Hook" Hukee
A-1 Skyraider Association*

*FYI: The following italicized type indicates new info, added to the original e-mail stream.
All inserted pictures are new.*

----- Original Message -----

From: "Bob Laymon" ScatbackScribe@gmail.com
To: "Don Morse" dmorse@psiint.com
Sent: Wednesday, August 13, 2003 10:18 PM
Subject: A-1H s.n. 139-780 gear-up landing @ Da Nang AB, RVN

We were transporting elements of the daily HQ 7th Air Force FRAG order, pre-strike & BDA photos, undeveloped gun camera film, radarscope camera film, radar/ thermographic/electronic reconnaissance products, intelligence reports/documents, official mail, small priority cargo boxes and passengers in a courier program predating what we now know (generically) as **FedEx**®.

At the time, we were actually close enough to the BAT 21B SAR AOR to routinely hear the various SAR radio calls on GUARD channel from 2 April through 13 April; however, at the time we only new the operation as "the big SAR effort up north". Undoubtedly, some of our classified courier material (e.g. [Cam Lo recce photos](#)) was supporting the Bat 21 Bravo SAR effort.

*Additionally, according to the definitive book **The Rescue of BAT 21**, Scatback T-39s transported a number of the supporting characters in this SAR effort back and forth between Tan Son Nhut, Da Nang, and NKP Air Bases. For example, on Saturday, 8 April 1972: Lt Col Andrew E. "Andy" Anderson, USMC, Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC), attached to J-2 Intel Div. MACV (MACSOG-80) flew in Maj Gen Marshall's jet (a Scatback T-39) from TSN to Da Nang in support of BAT 21B SAR planning with Capt Fred Boli and members of the SAR task force. My Scatback Scribe "Form 5" indicates I was probably the crew chief on this sortie.*

I digress. Back to 4 April 1972 and the Sandy 05 IFE:

After refueling and dropping-off the daily courier load, we were taxiing north in our T-39 from the Da Nang Base Ops / ALCC ramp on the western parallel taxiway, for departure on runway 17R. It was late afternoon (around sunset @

1801 hrs that Tuesday in 1972, twilight ended at 1822 hrs) when we began to hear MAYDAY calls from you in "Sandy 05" on GUARD channel - 243.0 UHF.

When we stopped our T-39 at the north end of the Da Nang taxiway run-up area, holding for departure from runway 17R, the MAYDAY calls from you in Sandy 05 began to get more intense (and more interesting!).

As I recall, your first Sandy 05 MAYDAY call stated "**MAYDAY – MAYDAY – MAYDAY, Sandy 05 ...I'm hit! ...I'm hit!**".

AAA had hit your A-1H in your right wing. You then transmitted that Sandy 05's right wing was on fire. The next call was that your 20mm ammo bay was "cooking-off". Humm? I remember the tenor and sense of anxiety in your voice rise as we listened intensely to GUARD channel. This was getting really interesting! *Sandy 05 declared an IFE and was flying southeast from Cam Lo towards the beach on the South China Sea, then south to our location @ Da Nang AB.*

My T-39 aircraft commander, *2nd Lt "Scatback" Jake Holmes* turned to the copilot *(don't remember who the CP/IP was?)* and then me and asked if we wanted to get-going back to Tan Son Nhut AB ...before the runway would be closed for the Sandy 05 IFE recovery, or stick around and watch the show?

About that time, you announced on GUARD that you had lost all hydraulics and could not lower your landing gear; therefore, you were requesting an approach-end "arrested" gear-up landing on runway 17L (the Gunfighter east side). "Da Nang Tower, Sandy 05, ...foam the runway!".

37 years have past and my memory is a little vague on the following UHF transmission between Da Nang tower control and Sandy 05; however, the conversation went something like this:

After Sandy 05 requested the foaming of runway 17L, the Da Nang tower controller replied: "Yes sir. How wide of foam strip would you like laid-down sir?" After a brief pause, Sandy 05 replied that the wingspan of his A-1H was 50 feet; therefore, how about a 50-foot wide patch of foam?

There is a long "pregnant-pause" as Da Nang tower contemplates this request.

"Sandy 05, Da Nang Tower. Sir, it takes about 20 minutes to lay-down a single 12-foot wide strip of foam that's 1,000-feet long. Uh, ...it's going to take ...(pause for math calculation) an hour and 23 minutes to lay down a 50-foot wide strip of foam. Can you wait that long, sir? Over."

After a brief pause, Sandy 05 replies: "I think a 12-foot wide foam patch will be just fine." ☺

That did it! We were holding only about 1,000 feet from where your A-1H would touchdown on 17L; therefore, we had "front row seats" to history. The CP and I voted to stay and watch the excitement. The AC, *2nd Lt Holmes* agreed!

The sun had gone down behind Freedom Hill 327 and twilight had set in. Everything outside of our T-39's windscreen had taken on an eerie shade of gray.



Figure 9 **Freedom Hill (Hill #327)**

Credit: SMSgt Jimmy Jones

It seems like we sat in the run-up area burning JP-4 for quite some time as Sandy 05 made its way to Da Nang. Perhaps 15 – 20 minutes. *Tango Mike later told me that after flying down the coast, he was in an IFE holding pattern, east of Da Nang and Monkey Mountain, performing a battle-damage controllability check while the runway was being foamed.* The Da Nang fire department was foaming the approach-end of runway 17L with one of their F-6 red tanker / blue tractor refuelers, converted into a 5,000 gallon "protein" foam truck.

"There he is!" I shouted. Sandy 05 suddenly appeared out of the mist and darkness over Da Nang harbor (gear-up / tail hook down / stores jettisoned) for a straight-in approach to runway 17L. Sandy 05 flew a shallow approach and appeared to 'float' a bit in ground-effect. Thena **HUGE**

shower of orange / yellow sparks appeared as the prop dug into the concrete runway and the engine beat itself to death. It was spectacular! Like the sparks from a giant grinding wheel. The column of sparks rose perhaps ~100 feet up into the night sky.

FYI: A gear-up landing is normally accomplished at idle or "chopped" (cut-off) power. TM later told me that he had applied full power in the flair, in an attempt to fly a missed approach, to bailout. The fact that his Wright Cyclone R3350-26WD engine was revving up to it's full 2,700 horse power rating, just as the prop dug into the runway probably made this the most spectacular spark show in Skyraider history!

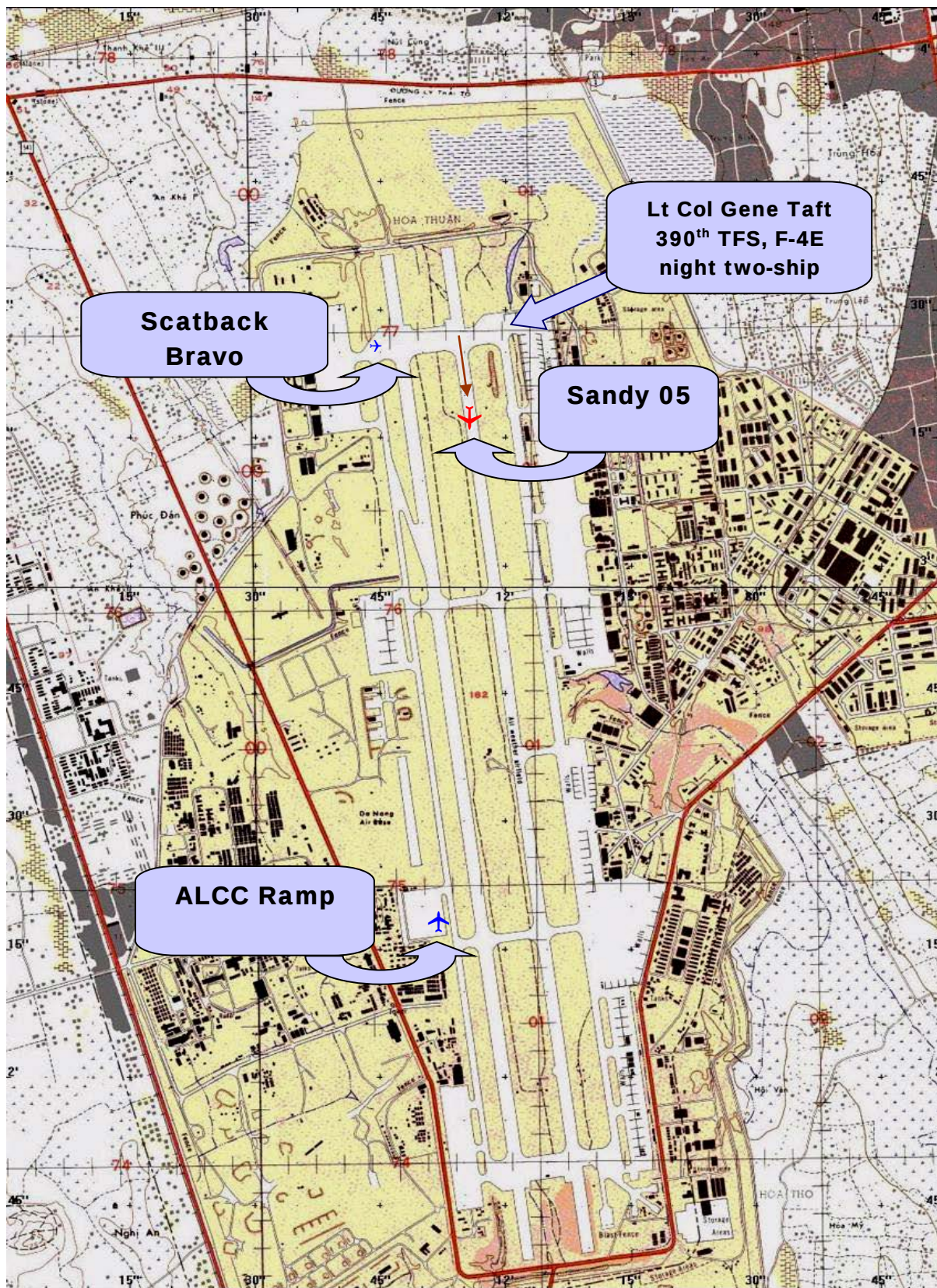


Figure 11 Position of Sandy 05, Scatback Bravo, and F-4E two-ship at Da Nang AB, RVN.

You snagged the approach-end arresting cable with your tailhook and came to an abrupt stop. S.N. 139-780 just sat there, gear-up on its belly in the protein foam for a moment, when I noticed a small orange "stack fire" coming up from the exhaust.

Then, I remember seeing a small blue flash of light from the cockpit area, as you "blew" the canopy off *or, was it a background photo-flash?* I saw your dark shadowy figure as you jumped from the cockpit, down onto the left wing, down to the runway and struggled in the slippery protein foam (the primary agent is ox blood, with a reddish tint and smelled badly) ...then you ran like hell from the aircraft *and a rapidly approaching AF fire / rescue truck!*

The 'show' was over and Da Nang tower cleared us in Scatback Bravo for immediate departure on 17R. "Scatback Bravo, contact Panama on departure control, 367.8. Good evening, sir."

To bring things full circle, the next day (Wednesday, April 5th 1972) I was back at Da Nang on Scatback Alpha (the in-country morning mission, aboard T-39A s.n. 61-0652). I noticed A-1H 139-780 sitting erect on its extended landing gear at the adjacent 37th ARRS parking ramp.



Figure 12 A-1H, s.n. 139-780 @ Da Nang AB, RVN

Credit: Don Sutton

I walked over to 139-780 and actually stood inside the hole in the right wing and examined the battle damage, as depicted in the following photo:



Figure 13 A-1H, s.n. 139-780 @ Da Nang AB, RVN

Credit: Don Sutton

-----Original Message-----

From: Don Morse [mailto:dmorse@psiint.com] [R.I.P.]
 Sent: Thursday, August 14, 2003 9:42 AM
 To: Bob Laymon
 Subject: Re: A-1H s.n. 139-780 gear-up landing @ Da Nang AB, RVN

Chief (Bob),

Your recollection is right on and quite factual. The date sounds about right. This event took place on the 5th day of the Eastertide Offensive and 3rd day of the rescue attempt for BAT 21B (Lt. Col. Iceal Hambleton) in an area just south of the DMZ during a major North Vietnamese offensive.
<http://www.thebattleofkontum.com/stars/1.html>

The North Vietnamese were well armed and fortified. The weather was poor, we had 10 Sandys and two HH-53s up, but there was no opportunity for a rescue attempt that day. My wingman and I were covering (*providing comm, support and comfort*) the first survivor (Lt Col Hambleton) when I experienced radio problems. I surrendered the lead to my wingman while I attended to the radio problem. My wingman was orbiting north of the Mieu Giang River and east of the BAT 21B survivor. I was rejoining to retake the lead, giving hand-signals out the left side of the canopy; therefore, did not see the volley of AAA directed at me from my right side.

I took the hit in the right wing where the two M-3 20mm cannons are located. The cannon are hydraulically operated. The 57mm hit (or possibly 37mm) severed the hydraulic lines, pumping gallons of MIL-H-5606 hydraulic fluid into

a very impressive wing fire. The flames extended approximately 40 feet aft of the wing.

I dumped all my ordinance to avoid the flames and the possibility of further detonations, deployed the tailhook, turned east (toward the coast) and as I recall dumped hydraulic pressure, but by then there was no fluid left to dump. As the plane was controlled by hydraulic assisted controls (much like power steering in a car) the controls were very difficult to operate. That coupled by a significant loss of aerodynamic lift on the right wing made flying most challenging.

The fire was hot enough that it burned through the wing skin of the aircraft and I could see pieces of the aircraft falling off. The heat was so intense that I was leaning to the left in the cockpit to avoid the radiant heat coming from the right side.



Figure 16 **A-1H, s.n. 139-780 battle damage**

This aircraft never flew again after 4 April 1972 (abandoned Class 26 - Da Nang)

Photo used with the permission of Lt Col (Ret.) Byron "Hook" Hukee
A-1 Skyraider Association

The 20mm percussion primed ammo in my right wing began to explode from the fire and heat, resulting in more pieces of the wing falling off. As the 20mm gun would overheat in the flames, the round in the chamber would explode, firing its projectile out through the barrel. As the gun continued to auto-fire, it would also pull more belt-fed 20mm rounds from the ammo can into the fire. These shells would then overheat and explode like a series of firecrackers. The 20mm explosions would calm down for a moment and then another dozen or

so rounds would explode in the right wing, repeating the process. The hole in my wing kept growing larger.

Finally, the fire subsided but I feared the wing might be so weakened that it could fail. The wing might fold over the canopy, making successful extraction impossible.

As I approached the coast, a Navy aircraft carrier on Yankee Station informed me they were speeding towards me if I needed to eject or ditch.

*FYI: The **USS Coral Sea** and **Hancock** were on Yankee Station when the North Vietnamese Easter Offensive began on 30 March 1972. **Kitty Hawk** was ordered to Yankee Station on 1 April and arrived on 3 April, the day before this IFE. Any one of these three carriers could have been responding to the Mayday calls from Sandy 05.*

By now my heart had slowed down, the fire was out and I could see the beach through the large hole in my right wing. I thanked the Navy, but declined their offer, opting instead for a gear-up landing on a foamed runway at Da Nang *(night, blacked-out, i.e. no landing lights, no instruments, limited control authority!)*.

Controlling the aircraft became increasingly difficult, making the landing a memorable event.



Figure 17 **Airborne view on approach to runway 17L/R at Da Nang AB, RVN**

Credit: Lt Col Jim Reed, Scatback T-39 I.P.

When I got low to the ground, ground-effect produced more lift on the left (good) wing, than the damaged right wing and I began to drift to the right. Fearing I might miss, or slide off the runway, I added power to climb-out so I

could get to a safe ejection area; however, the aircraft continued to settle and the tail hook caught the approach-end arresting cable and the aircraft came to an abrupt, but safe stop in the foam.

Seeing the stack flame, I decided to egress and get the hell away from the plane. I egressed from the left side of the aircraft. I had requested the runway be foamed to minimize crash damage and fire potential. It was slippery and in trying to run away from the aircraft, I slipped and fell several times in the foam. Each time I got up, I saw the fire truck racing towards the crash scene.

Now the fire truck also appeared to be sliding around in the slippery foam. I thought, "Damn, I survived getting shot, an in-flight fire, a crash landing and now I'm going to be killed by a fire truck!" Finally, I made progress but that huge fire truck wheel stopped only about 10 feet away from me!

I did visit that hangar the next day to pay tribute to one tough aircraft that got me home safe.

I continued to fly in the A-7 and finally the A-10.

It was great reliving that on the phone with you last night.

Don Morse
Tango Mike

Postscript:

EB-66C, s.n. 54-0466 combat crew, mission call sign - BAT 21:

The Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) lists the following BAT 21 crewmembers as status XX - Presumptive Finding of Death:

- Maj Wayne L. Bolte – Pilot
- Lt Col Charles A. Levis – EWO
- Lt Col Anthony R. Giannangeli – EWO
- Maj Henry M. Serex – EWO
- 1st Lt Robin F. Gatwood – EWO.

*The remains of BAT 21's crew have not been repatriated.

During the course of this SAR effort, numerous aircraft were shotdown or battle damaged during the NVA invasion of MR I, below the DMZ.

Among the most tragic was the loss of Blueghost 39, a US Army UH-1H Huey who attempted a “quick snatch” rescue of BAT 21B on 2 April 1972, the first day of the SAR effort.

KIA were:

- 1st Lt Byron Kulland
 - WO John Frink
 - Sp5c Ronald Paschall
- ✓ Taken POW was Sp5c Jose Astorga who had been wounded in his chest and leg.

An equally tragic loss was the crew of Jolly Green 67, an HH-53C Super Jolly Green Giant shotdown on 6 April 1972 while attempting a rescue of BAT 21B and Nail 38B.

KIA were:

- Capt Peter Chapman
- 1st Lt John Call III
- TSgt Roy Prater
- TSgt Allen Avery
- Sgt William Pearson
- Sgt James Alley

Allied VNAF and ARVN losses in the Quang Tri Province AOR were staggering.

The Rescue of BAT 21 is the *largest and most famous SAR effort in the history of the U.S. Air Force. Over eight hundred strike sorties were flown in direct support of the BAT 21B SAR (including close-in B-52 Arc Light bomber strikes). At least eight US rescue aircraft were shotdown, two US rescuers became POWs, and eleven American heroes paid the ultimate price attempting to rescue a single Lieutenant Colonel (and subsequently a 1st Lt and Capt) down behind enemy lines during the Eastertide Offensive of 1972.

**Source: NMUSAF: “This was the largest rescue operation in USAF history.”*
http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=1236&page=1

However, in making this ultimate sacrifice, we pause to remember the motto of these heroic search and rescue forces: ****“That others may live”** †

***Motto coined by Brig Gen Richard T. Kight, commander of the Air Rescue Service during the Korean War.*

† **John 15:13** -- *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."*

A total of 234 medals were awarded to individuals for the Bat 21B rescue mission. USN Lt Norris was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Lieutenant **Thomas R. Norris**, United States Naval Reserve



Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a SEAL Advisor with the Strategic Technical Directorate Assistance Team, Headquarters, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. During the period 10 to 13 April 1972, Lieutenant Norris completed an unprecedented ground rescue of two downed pilots deep within heavily controlled enemy territory in Quang Tri Province. Lieutenant Norris, on the night of 10 April, led a five-man patrol through 2,000 meters of heavily controlled enemy territory, located one of the downed pilots at daybreak, and returned to the Forward Operating Base (FOB). On 11 April, after a devastating mortar and rocket attack on the small FOB, Lieutenant Norris led a three man team on two unsuccessful rescue attempts for the second pilot. On the afternoon of the 12th, a Forward Air Controller located the pilot and notified Lieutenant Norris. Dressed in fishermen disguises and using a sampan, Lieutenant Norris and one Vietnamese traveled throughout that night and found the injured pilot at dawn. Covering the pilot with bamboo and vegetation, they began the return journey, successfully evading a North Vietnamese patrol. Approaching the FOB, they came under heavy machine gun fire. Lieutenant Norris called in an air strike which provided suppression fire and a smoke screen, allowing the rescue party to reach the FOB. By his outstanding display of decisive leadership, undaunted courage, and selfless dedication in the face of extreme danger, Lieutenant Norris enhanced the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

LT (Ret.) Tom Norris, in his own words:

*Click on the **Pritzker Military Library** icon ► to start video:*

<http://www.pritzkermilitarylibrary.org/Home/Medal-of-Honor-Thomas-Norris.aspx>

PO Nguyễn Văn Kiệt was awarded the US Navy Cross, http://www.homeofheroes.com/brotherhood/seals_kiet_award.html the only Vietnamese national so recognized during the Vietnam War.

<http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.achievement.org/achievers/tho0/photos/tho0-004a.gif&imgrefurl=http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/tho0bio-1&h=244&w=349&sz=69&tbnid=OM9D99Xbu8QWJM:&tbnh=81&tbnw=116&hl=en&start=7&prev=/images%3Fq%3DThomas%2BNorris%2BMedal%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D>

Capt Don Morse was awarded the Silver Star for his actions as Sandy Lead and on-scene commander during the initial Bat 21B SAR effort. Morse also received the Distinguished Flying Cross with three oak leaf clusters, Meritorious Service Medal with one oak leaf cluster, the Air Medal with seven oak leaf clusters, AF outstanding Unit Award... etc. for numerous CAS, interdiction and SAR efforts during his Skyraider tour of duty @ NKP RTAFB, from October 1971 – 1972.

Lt Col Hambleton would be subsequently awarded the following decorations:



Figure 18

Silver Star

Distinguished Flying Cross

Air Medal

Purple Heart

Donald E. Morse

Maj. Donald Edwin Morse, USA, Ret., of Gaithersburg, MD passed away on Saturday, March 8, 2009. He was the beloved husband for 35 years of Sydney W. Morse; loving father of Heather L. Morse, Mia M. Wright, Benjamin M. Morse and Noelle P. Morse; loving son of Mary Boman; loving brother of Kathy Morse and Judy Denlinger. He is also survived by three grandchildren, Madeline, Luke and Nate Wright.

HAMBLETON, ICEAL EUGENE
LT COL US AIR FORCE
WORLD WAR II, KOREA, VIETNAM
DATE OF BIRTH: 11/16/1918
DATE OF DEATH: 09/19/2004
BURIED AT: SECTION C2-34 / ROW C / SITE 8
ABRAHAM LINCOLN NATIONAL CEMETERY
20953 WEST HOFF ROAD
ELWOOD, IL 60421
(815) 423-9958

A-1 Skyraider Association:

To read more about the fabulous A-1 Skyraider, its mission, equipment and people, go to the A-1 Skyraider Association web site, maintained by Lt Col (Ret.) Byron "Hook" Hukee who graduated in the next A-1 RTU class # [72-05](#), and flew combat as a 1st Lt Skyraider pilot with both Morse and Brown @ NKP. <http://skyraider.org/>

Post-Postscript: *"The Odyssey"*

The following sequence of events records how we tracked-down and documented the details of TM's gear-up landing.

(Sometimes "the journey" is as interesting as the destination) ☺

1974 through 1976: Don Morse, AFMPC and Bob Laymon, 12th FTW/MAL are stationed across the street from each other at Randolph AFB, but unaware of the other. *Two ships pass in the night!*

Wednesday, 13 August 2003: I was talking with retired Major Ken Smith in the Randolph Base Exchange snack bar discussing details of our overlapping SEA tours. I didn't know that Ken was a prior-service NCO and one of Tango Mike's former Skyraider crew chiefs on A-1H s.n. 139-780. *Then*-SSgt Ken Smith was initially PCS @ NKP (March 1971) and then assigned as the NCOIC of the Skyraider FOL @ Da Nang until he DEROSed on 22 March 72; therefore, just missed the '72 Eastertide Offensive.

I mentioned to Ken that I had seen a picture of A-1H s.n. 139-780 in Chapter 5 of Byron Hukee's **A-1 Skyraider Combat Journal** web page

<http://skyraider.org/hook/journalset/journalsec5.htm> and that I had coincidentally been an eyewitness to that gear-up landing while awaiting take-off in our Scatback Bravo T-39 at Da Nang.

Then, Colonel (Ret.) Gene Taft walked up to the Randolph BX snack bar and said hi. I mentioned to Ken Smith that Gene flew with the 390th TFS “Wild Boars” at Da Nang and subsequently as commander of the 4th TFS at Takhli RTAFB and had scored an F-4E (AIM-7E-2) victory over a MiG-21 during operation Linebacker X-Ray III on Saturday, 29 July 1972 during a raid against two bridges in North Vietnam.

The *Odyssey* continues: I then went over to the National HQ – Order of Daedalians and related my encounter to Skyraider veterans Col (Ret.) Bob Karre and Lt Col (Ret.) Rocco De Felice. They provided me with a telephone number for Tango Mike at his home in Gaithersburg, MD.

On Wednesday evening, 13 August 2003, I decided to call TM “out-of-the-blue” at his home in Maryland and relive the events surrounding his gear-up landing. It turns out we were able to merge more details and perspectives on this event than has been previously recorded. These details are captured in our e-mail exchange of 13-14 August 2003.

In our initial telecom, TM and I agreed to look for future reunion opportunities. The reunion happened four months later on Monday evening, 15 December 2003 when I was on a business trip to Rosslyn, VA. I met TM and we had dinner @ Morton’s Steakhouse in the tubes @ Crystal City.

TM and I were both amazed at the level of detail we were both able to recall from those *heady daze*, 32 years previous in 1972. We talked, laughed and reviewed pictures of the SEA war in the Scatback PowerPoint briefing I have on my laptop computer. TM debriefed the Icebag 01 (F-105G) SAR effort 25 nm west-southwest of Hanoi where TM and Byron Hukee flew as Sandy 01 & Sandy 02 on the second day of Linebacker 1:

FYI: At this point on my trip to Washington D.C., I had just finished reading Darrel Whitcomb’s book, **The Rescue of Bat 21** and had some difficulty processing the significance of these two chance encounters. It was a bit overwhelming to have met both Sandy 05 and Nail 38B in the course of less than 24 hours.

More Odyssey and Irony: Almost a year later, on Wednesday evening 28 July 2004, I called Col (Ret.) Gene Taft at his home in San Antonio, TX to commemorate the anniversary of his MiG-21 kill.

As we discussed our common experiences while at Da Nang in 1972, the subject of **The Rescue of BAT 21** came up. I began to recount the events of the SAR on-scene commander, *then*-Capt Don Morse's gear-up landing in his battle damaged A-1H at Da Nang after sunset on Tuesday, 4 April 1972.

In the strangest of coincidences, it turns out that *then*-Lt Col Gene Taft was #1 holding for take-off on runway 17L at Da Nang, leading an F-4E two-ship night mission with the 390th TFS Wild Boars, when Sandy 05 made his gear-up landing in front of him (and us!). Gene was holding on the Gunfighter village side of Da Nang and recalled the same details in our telephone conversation, from his opposite perspective.

According to Gene, after things settled down and the runway 17L protein foam mess was cleaned up and FOD-walked, Da Nang tower cleared Taft's two-ship F-4E flight to taxi across the approach end of 17L (behind the disabled Skyraider) and take-off from 17R, which would have placed him immediately behind our Scatback Bravo departure on 17R.

Gene's Flight Log, 4 April 1972: AC-130 'Specter 21' gunship night escort mission in VR 7. Expended ordinance in suppressing NVA guns on the HCM trail, 2.5 hrs F-4E. Cherry refueling anchor FRAGed - no fuel, diverted to Peach anchor (200nm distance) no fuel, finally, diverted to Yellow anchor and completed one night refueling.

In the continuing series of ironic events related to **The Rescue of BAT 21**, Gene rotated to Hahn AB, GE as the vice commander of the 50th TFW, following his SEA tour. The wing director of resource management at Hahn was a Colonel "Walker" ...the father of deceased 1st Lt Bruce Walker, Covey 282 Alpha, an OV-10A member of the SAR force on the BAT 21B effort, flying with the 20th TASS out of Da Nang.

Gene has the F-4E cockpit audiotape of "Lacey" flight with Bruce Walker's final moments recorded as the VC cadre was approaching his E&E position in the sand dunes NE of Dong Ha on Tuesday, 18 April 1972. Gene described Walker's calls for help on the F-4E cockpit tape as the VC approached his hiding position. Walker was subsequently shot and killed by a VC guerrilla.

Gene struggled with the notion of sharing this audiotape with Bruce Walker's father. It had only been six months and these were the final recorded words of

Col Walker's son in combat. Eventually, Gene shared the tape with Col Walker. He was gratefully.

Gene also shared the F-4E cockpit tape from Lacey flight with Col Darrel D. Whitcomb who used it as reference material in his definitive book: **The Rescue of Bat 21 (NOTES, Chapter 11. Bruce Walker, footnote 8).**

<http://www.thebattleofkontum.com/stars/016.html>



11 Days In Jungle Radios, Training Saved Flier's Life

CLARK AIR BASE, Philippines (UPI) --An unflappable U.S. Air Force navigator, rescued after 11 harrowing days in the jungles of South Vietnam's war zone, Tuesday credited his two tiny radios and his jungle survival training with keeping him alive.

Weak, tired and 35 pounds underweight, Lt. Col. Iceal Eugene "Gene" Hambleton, 53, was picked up by a U.S. Navy team in a sampan April 13. Bad weather and heavy Communist fire had forced the Air Force to abandon attempts at an aerial rescue after his plane was shot down.

"That sampan looked like the Queen Mary," Hambleton said in a hospital interview here. Except for a broken left wrist and a fractured index finger on his left hand, Hambleton -born in Rossville, Ill., but who calls Tucson, Ariz., home -looked in good condition.

Hambleton told how his plane, an EB-66 jet bomber belonging to the 42nd Tactical Electronics Warfare Squadron (TEWS) was on a radar spotting and jamming mission April 2 shortly after the North Vietnamese began their offensive. The plane with its six-man crew was struck by a Russian-build surface-to-air missile at an altitude of 29,000 feet 10 to 15 miles below the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

"I watched the plane go into a cloud bank and I didn't see any more chutes come out," he said. The other five crewmen are listed as missing.

The navigator landed in a rice paddy right in the middle of a battle with troops shooting on both sides. He hid in a nearby tree line for the next five days, he said, eating banana stalks and berries and drinking rain water while awaiting rescue.

But bad weather and Communist fire on rescue planes forced him to remain in the jungle. Military spokesmen in Saigon said seven aircraft were shot down trying to get to Hambleton.

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