

tanks and artillery rushed into Military Region I. Maj. David A. Brookbank, a U.S. Air Force air liaison officer with the South Vietnamese 3d Division reported, "With three enemy divisions plus heavy artillery striking . . . the 3d ARVN was unable to return fire or request TACAIR [tactical air strikes] in the area . . . This operation cost the 3d ARVN dearly." Brookbank added, "After the zones were terminated, the enemy was already south of the Cua Viet and Mieu Cay rivers in strength."⁶¹

With the Vietnamese unable to call for air support and restricted from firing their own artillery into this no-fire zone, "The SAR restriction" as Brookbank said, "gave the enemy an opportunity unprecedented in the annals of warfare to advance at will."⁶² For eleven days any damage inflicted on the North Vietnamese Army in this part of their invasion corridor was coincidental to the rescue operation. On one occasion, however, that damage was considerable. A forward air controller spotted a column of tanks on Route 1. Task Force Alpha targeteers called for a B-52 strike and six of the giants rippled the road destroying thirty-five tanks and, as was later discovered through intelligence sources, an enemy command center.⁶³

How did the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service units in Southeast Asia determine how much rescue effort was enough? At what point did someone in authority decide that a downed airman could not be rescued because the cost was too high? There were, in fact, no guidelines. No regulations existed which defined when anyone had to be abandoned because the danger was too great or the cost in lives and aircraft might be too great.

During the Korean War, the commander of the Air Rescue Service Brig. Gen. Richard T. Kight, coined the motto, "That others may live."⁶⁴

BAT 21 SAR

US Air Force Historic Event Initiative

The Search and Rescue (SAR) operation for -----

SOURCE =
Ron THURLOW

DATE	RANK	NAME	ACFT	S/N	DISP	ACTION
2 Apr 72	1Lt	Richard Abbot	O-2A	68-10842?		Mike 81, 20TASS / Da Nang, shot down Hit over DMZ, made it feet wet for bailout Picked up by USS Sumner
2 Apr 72	Capt	Harold Icke	O-2A	x		Bilk 11, launched as SAR OSC for Mike 81
2 Apr 72	Capt	Dan Morse	A-1	x		Sandy 07, launched to support Mike 81 SAR
	x	x	A-1	x		Sandy 08
2 Apr 72	x	x	HH-53C	68-10363 (9	Jolly Green 65, 37ARRS / Da Nang	
	x	x - CP				
	x	x - FE				
	x	x - PJ				
	x	x - PJ				
	x	Griffith	HH-53C	68-10365 (2	Jolly Green 67, 37ARRS	
	x	Peck - CP				
	TSgt	Roy Prater - FE				Picked up crew of Blueghost 28 from beach
	x	Robert LaPointe - PJ				
	x	Aillett - PJ				
2 Apr 72	Maj	Wayne Bolte	EB-66C	54-0466	(1	Bat 21, 42TEWS / Korat, shot down by SA-2
	Lt Col	Iceal E. Hambleton - N				Lt Col Hambleton only survivor
	Maj	Henry Serex - EWO				
	1Lt	Anthony Giannangeli - EWO				
	Lt Col	Charles Levis - EWO				
	1Lt	Robin Gatwood - EWO				
	Maj	Robert Chappelle	EB-66E	x		Bat 22, 42TEWS
	Lt Col	Jim Ely - N				
	Maj	Edward Anderson - EWO				
2 Apr 72	1Lt	Bill Jankowski	O-2A	x		Bilk 34, initial OSC
	Capt	Lyle Wilson				
2 Apr 72	Capt	Dan Morse	A-1	x		Sandy 07, later OSC
	x	x	x	x		Sandy 08
2 Apr 72	1Lt	Byron Kulland	UH-1H	x		Blueghost 39, 8th Cav / F Troop, shot down
	WO	John Frink - CP				Sp Astorga only survivor, POW - released 1973
	Sp5c	Ronald Paschall - CC				
	Sp5C	Jose Astorga - G				
	WO	Ben Nielson	UH-1H	x		Blueghost 30
	x	x - CP				
	x	x - CC				
	x	x - G				

2 Apr 72	Capt WO x x	Mike Rosebeary Gorski - G x x - G	AH-1 AH-1	x x	Blueghost 28, attempted SAR w/ BG 39 Hit, landed on beach, recovered by JG 67 Blueghost 24
2 Apr 72	Capt x 1Lt x	Tim Sprouse x - G Chuck LaCelle x - G	AH-1 AH-1	x x	Blueghost Red, attempted night SAR Blueghost 26
2 Apr 72	x	x	O-2A	x	Trail 34, 20TASS / Da Nang
2 Apr 72	Capt x	Gary Ferentchak x	OV-10	x	Nail 59, 23TASS / NKP, relieved Bilk34 as OSC
2 Apr 72	x Maj	x Bruce Driscoll - MC	HC-130	x	King 22
2 Apr 72	Maj	Dennis Constant	HC-130	x	King 27

Summary

- Mike 81 shot down near DMZ about 2:15pm. Bilk 11, Sandy 07/08, and JG 65/67 launched for SAR. Navy ship p/u.
- Bat 21/22 escort B-52 strike near DMZ. Bat 21 shot down by SA-2 about 4:50pm. Lt Col Hambleton only survivor.
- Army UH-1 Blueghost 39 makes rescue attempt escorted by AH-1 Blueghost 28. Blueghost 39 shot down during msn.
- Blueghost 28 receives severe AAA damage and heads for coast for emer lndg on beach, JG 65 rescues two-man crew.
- UH-1 Blueghost 30 and AH-1s Blueghost Red/26 attempt yet another rescue after dark but again unsuccessful.
- ABCCC King 27 damaged when engaged by five SA-2s, Nail 59 evades three SA-2s fired at them.

3 Apr 72	Capt Capt	Rocky Smith Rick Atchison	OV-10A	x	Nail 25, alternate OSC duty w/ Nail 38
3 Apr 72	x x	x x	OV-10A	x	Nail 22, SAR lead for attempted pickup
3 Apr 72	Capt x	Dan Morse x	A-1 A-1	x x	Sandy 07 Sandy 08
3 Apr 72	1Lt x	Robert Burke x	A-1 A-1	x x	Sandy 03, NKP - overhead CAP during SAR Sandy 04
3 Apr 72	1Lt x	Glen Priebe x	A-1 A-1	x x	Sandy 05, Ubon - escorted SAR attempt Sandy 06
3 Apr 72	LCdr x x x x	Jay Crowe x - CP x - FE x - PJ x - PJ	HH-53C	68-10363 (9 Jolly Green 65, 37ARRS / Da Nang	Attempted SAR, hit, emer landing Hue
		PEARSON			
	x x x x x	x x - CP x - FE x - PJ x - PJ	HH-53C	68-10365 (2 Jolly Green 67	High Bird during SAR, picked up JG 65 crew after emer landing at Hue
		LAPORTE			

3 Apr 72	Lt Col	William Harris	HH-53C	68-10368 (3	Jolly Green 66, 37ARRS, got within 100 yds. Attempted SAR, hit, emer landing at Hue
	x	x - CP			
	x	x - FE			
	x	x - PJ			
	x	x - PJ			

	x	x	HH-53C	68-10358 (9	Jolly Green 60
	x	x - CP			High Bird during SAR, picked up JG 66 crew after emer landing at Hue
	x	x - FE			
	x	x - PJ			
	x	x - PJ			

3 Apr 72	Capt 1Lt	Bill Henderson Mark Clark	OV-10A	68-3789 (1	Nail 38, alternate OSC, shot down by SAM. Both on grnd ok, 38A captured, 38B evades
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3 Apr 72	Capt	Fred C. Boli	A-1	x	Sandy 01
	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy 02

3 Apr 72	Capt	Tim Sprouse	AH-1	x	Blueghost Red, attempted rescue of N 38B with Blueghost 26 and 30, driven off by AAA
	x	x - G			Blueghost 26
	1Lt	Chuck LaCelle	AH-1	x	
	x	x - G			
	WO	Ben Nielson	UH-1H	x	Blueghost 30
	x	x - CP			
	x	x - CC			
	x	x - G			

3 Apr 72	Maj	Gary Gamble	HH-53C	x	Jolly Green x, 40ARRS / NKP, NRS-equipped
	x	x - CP			
	x	x - FE			
	x	x - PJ			
	x	x - PJ			

	Capt	Mark Schibler	HH-53C	x	Jolly Green x, deployed Da Nang for poss. use
	x	x - CP			
	x	x - FE			
	x	x - PJ			
	x	x - PJ			

Summary

- 3ARRG directs two 40ARRS HH-53s with Night Recovery System (NRS) deploy to Da Nang for possible use in SAR.
- Morning OSC determines area still too hot for rescue attempt, puts many airstrikes in to "soften up" for later attempt.
- PM rescue attempt by JG 65, Sandy 05/06, and Nail 38. JG 65 shot badly shot up - makes emer lndg at Hue.
- Second attempt by JG 66, Sandy 05/06, and Nail 22. JG 66 gets within 100 yds but shot up - makes emer lndg at Hue.
- Nail 38 shot down by SAM, both crewmen eject safely. Rescue attempt by Blueghost 30 / Red / 26 is unsuccessful.
- All three helos make emergency recovery at Quang Tri, so badly shot up they are total losses. Nail 38B still evading.

4 Apr 72	Capt	Harold Icke	O-2A	x	Bilk 11
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4 Apr 72	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy
	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy
	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy
	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy

4 Apr 72	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy
	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy
	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy

x	x	A-1	x	Sandy
x	x	A-1	x	Sandy
x	x	A-1	x	Sandy

4 Apr 72	x	x	HH-53C	x	Jolly Green
	x	x - CP			
	x	x - FE			
	x	x - PJ			
	x	x - PJ			

	x	x	HH-53C	x	Jolly Green
	x	x - CP			
	x	x - FE			
	x	x - PJ			
	x	x - PJ			

Summary

- Rescue force of 10 A-1s and two HH-53s assembled for another attempt but A-1s unable to suppress defenses.
- Total of eight SAMs fired at Sandies, eight of ten aircraft receive damage from intense AAA. Attempt called off.

5 Apr 72 - Bad weather precludes any chance of rescue attempt. F-4s put CBU-42 anti-personnel mines around Bat 21B.

Capt	Begert	O-2A	67-21395 (5	Unk c/s, directed fighters despite damage, DFC
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6 Apr 72	Capt	Harold Icke	O-2A	x	Bilk 11
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6 Apr 72	Capt	Gary Ferentchak	OV-10A	x	Nail 59
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Capt	Fred C. Boli	A-1	x	Sandy 01, OSC (Note 1)
x	x	A-1	x	Sandy 02

6 Apr 72	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy 03, arrived 5pm w/ smoke screen ord
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6 Apr 72	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy 05
	x	x	A-1	x	Sandy 06

6 Apr 72	Capt	Peter Chapman	HH-53C	68-10365 (1	Jolly Green 67, shot down during SAR attempt
	1Lt	John Call III - CP			Got within 100 yds of survivor before driven off
	TSgt	Roy Prater - FE			All aboard fatally injured in crash
	TSgt	Allen Avery - PJ			
	Sgt	William Pearson - PJ			
	Sgt	James Alley - Photog			

x	x	HH-53C	68-10358 (9	Jolly Green 60
x	x - CP			
x	x - FE			
x	x - PJ			
x	x - PJ			

6 Apr 72	Capt	Mark Schibler	HH-53C	x	Jolly Green x, 40ARRS, holding off coast
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x	x - CP
x	x - FE
x	x - PJ
x	x - PJ

x	x	HH-53C	x	Jolly Green x
x	x - CP			
x	x - FE			
x	x - PJ			
x	x - PJ			

YOU GOT GATOR?



ARTICLE FROM VIETNAM

Brave Jolly Green

The entire North Vietnamese Army was on the move, but that didn't stop the Air Force's search and rescue helicopters.

By Colonel Darrell D. Whitcomb, U.S. Air Force Reserve (ret.)

Editor's note: The June 1997 issue of Vietnam features U.S. Air Force Colonel Darrell Whitcomb's story of the B-52 bomber strike against the North Vietnamese during the massive 1972 Easter Offensive, the shootdown of a Douglas EB-66 electronic warfare aircraft, and the downing of "Blueghost 39," an air cavalry helicopter (see "Heroic Huey Search-and-Rescue Mission" on TheHistoryNet). As in the classic Japanese movie Rashomon, where a tragic incident is told from many different perspectives, Colonel Whitcomb, a former forward air controller (FAC), tells the many-sided story of the attempts to rescue two downed American airmen in the spring of 1972. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Icel Hambleton (call sign Bat-21 Bravo) was the navigator of the EB-66 that was shot down while leading the B-52 bomber strike. First Lieutenant Mark Clark was the navigator of a North American Rockwell OV-10 FAC aircraft shot down in an early attempt to extract Hambleton. The efforts to locate and rescue both men--later sensationalized in a 1988 movie, Bat-21, starring Gene Hackman, Dannie Glover and Jerry Reed (none of whom were "particularly believable" in their roles, according to one reviewer)--actually involved separate Army, Air Force and Navy operations. What follows is Whitcomb's account of the Air Force operations.

At approximately 3:15 p.m. on April 6, U.S. Air Force Captain Fred Boli took off from the American air base at Da Nang in a prop-driven Douglas A-1 Skyraider fighter-bomber (known as a "Sandy"). With Boli, whose call sign was Sandy 01, were three other A-1s, Sandys 02, 05 and 06, and two Sikorsky HH-53 rescue helicopters (known as "Jolly Greens"), Jolly Greens 67 and 60. A few minutes later two more Jolly Greens, led by Captain Mark Schibler, took off as backups.

The task force had two possible objectives. Colonel Hambleton, the EB-66 survivor, had now been on the ground four days and needed to be resupplied. Therefore, one A-1 (Boli's) was rigged to drop him a Madden resupply kit with

food, water, ammunition and extra radios. A rescue attempt could also be made if Boli, the Sandy leader, felt the situation warranted it. It would be Boli's call.

Lt. Col. Bill Harris, commander of the Jolly Green squadron, was concerned about the mission. Harris knew that there was still likely to be a significant enemy presence around the two downed Americans. He discussed the situation with his commander, Colonel Cecil Muirhead, in Saigon. Muirhead and his staff were also worried and were monitoring the ongoing rescue effort very closely.

Harris had intended to fly as aircraft commander on the lead Jolly Green during the April 6 mission. But he had participated in one of the earlier pickup attempts, when the choppers had been badly shot up, and his squadron mates insisted that he had already done his share. When Harris reluctantly stood aside, Captain Peter Chapman stepped forward and insisted that he be allowed to fly as aircraft commander on the mission. Harris was deeply impressed with Chapman's volunteering, especially since

Chapman was not next in the duty rotation and, in fact, had orders to return to the United States to fly with the presidential air unit at Andrews Air Force Base, in Maryland. But Chapman's attitude was typical of all of the men in his squadron, who were ready to risk their lives to save others. With Chapman on Jolly Green 67 were 1st Lt. John H. Call, III, co-pilot; Tech. Sgt. Roy D. Prater, mechanic; Sergeant William R. Pearson and Tech. Sgt. Allen J. Avery, pararescuemen; and Sergeant James H. Alley, photographer.

The gaggle of airplanes proceeded to a holding point southeast of Quang Tri, where Jolly Greens 67 and 60 and Sandys 05 and 06 circled while Sandys 01 and 02 entered the battle area to assess how dangerous it might be to attempt a pickup. There, they took over from the two FACs on station, Captain Harold Icke (call sign Bilk 11) and Captain Gary Ferentchak (call sign Nail 59). Icke and Ferentchak had been working the area jointly and finishing up the preparatory airstrikes. The two backup Jolly Greens were on hold at a position east of Hue, just off the South Vietnamese coast.

Boli noticed a friendly tank position approximately six kilometers south of the survivors and decided to make the final holding point for the helicopters right over them. But he was very concerned about the five enemy battalions that intelligence had told him were directly around the survivors. He spent the next 30 minutes trolling the planned ingress route for the helicopters, using his 7.62mm minigun to strafe anything that looked suspicious. Neither Boli, in Sandy 01, nor Sandy 02 observed any appreciable enemy reaction, but they did receive some enemy surface-to-air-missile (SAM) signals on the radio while they were checking out the area.

At 4:15 p.m., Boli directed the two FACs to terminate the airstrikes so that he could overfly the survivors' immediate area. He requested that Icke and Ferentchak as well as Sandy 02 and both Hambleton and Clark, on the ground, all listen on the same radio frequency and watch while he flew low around the survivors' positions. Boli also tried to drop the Madden supply kit to Hambleton,

but the arming wire on the device failed and the kit did not release from the aircraft. Boli did not know that, however, until he landed back at Da Nang.

Boli also strafed a few suspected NVA locations with his 20mm cannons and had Sandy 02 drop cluster bombs on other areas, widening his area of search as he did so. Boli directed the FACs to hit several areas with more airstrikes. While all of that was going on, Boli ordered Jolly Green 60 to hold southeast of Quang Tri and ordered Jolly Green 67 and Sandys 05 and 06 to proceed to the final holding point.

As the aircraft were repositioning, Captain Boli began his final briefing for all the participants in the rescue attempt. They would first try to pick up Hambleton, he said, then--depending on how the situation developed--they would try to extract Clark. The two would be picked up either by Jolly Green 67 or one of the other choppers. But the briefing was rudely interrupted by a SAM call, which forced all of the aircraft to dive for the deck to avoid the missiles. Boli noted that the SAM launches were not accompanied by any anti-aircraft artillery (AAA, or triple-A).

At 5:10 p.m., Sandy 03 joined the force with a full load of white phosphorus smoke, which could be used to lay a smoke screen. Boli finished the plan briefing--Sandy 02 would lead Jolly Green 67 in with a series of smoke rockets to pick up Hambleton and then Clark, in that order, if the area was quiet. Sandy 02 would then join with Sandys 05 and 06 in a "daisy chain" around the Jolly Green to provide suppressive fire. Sandy 03 would lay a series of well-placed smoke screens and then join the daisy chain. Sandy 01 would orbit above to direct the operation and call ground fire.

At 5:15 p.m., Boli determined that all requested targets had been struck to his satisfaction. He had the FACs and remaining strikes hold high and dry while he re-entered the survivors' immediate area to brief them and take one last look. He reviewed the plan and situation in his mind. He knew that it could be a trap, but the preparation had been thorough, the trolling and probing had been intense, and the enemy response so far had been slack. It was time to go!

Boli directed the task force to execute the pickup. Sandy 02 immediately laid down his marks for the helicopters to follow to Hambleton. Sandy 03 put down his smoke screen. Sandys 02, 05 and 06 began the daisy chain to protect the vulnerable helicopter and began dropping cluster bombs and strafing with their 20mm cannons anything that looked in any way threatening. A slight wind shift caused some of the smoke screen to partly obscure Hambleton's position. But the confusion was quickly resolved, and the force pressed on. Overhead, in the swirling mass of airplanes, Captain Ferentchak took out his camera and began to take pictures. He wanted to record what he thought was going to be a historic rescue.

As Jolly Green 67 crossed the river near Cam Lo, the helicopter began to take ground fire from all quarters. Seconds later, as it approached to within 100 meters of Hambleton, Boli called for the survivor to pop his red smoke so that

the Jolly Green crew could locate him. Almost simultaneously, someone on Jolly Green 67 called, "I'm hit." It was later determined that they also had added, "... they got a fuel line." Hambleton heard all of this on his survival radio and, realizing the gravity of the situation, did not pop his smoke and reveal his position.

The crew of Jolly Green 67 fought to control their damaged aircraft. Boli had briefed the helicopter crews that if they began taking ground fire, they were to immediately exit the area on a southeast heading. Realizing their desperate situation, the crew began to turn their craft to escape the cauldron of withering fire. The North Vietnamese gunners seemed to increase the intensity of their fire.

Boli ordered the other Sandys to cover the wounded Jolly Green, and he began strafing in front of the lumbering helicopter as it tried to gain speed. But instead of turning southeast as briefed, the crew began heading due east, toward the enemy concentrations north of the river nearby. Apparently one of the crew members on the Jolly Green was holding down his microphone transmit button, since numerous calls directing the chopper to "Turn south, Jolly, turn right!" were blocked. The crew finally turned south about one kilometer east of the planned route after Boli warned them not to cross over a village full of enemy troops. As the Jolly Green crew made their turn, Boli flew up behind them and strafed the enemy soldiers.

Jolly Green 67 overshot its turn and took up a heading to the southwest. Boli ordered the chopper to turn back to the left. Someone else came on the radio and told the chopper to turn right. Boli tells the story from there: "Jolly hesitated, and again I ordered, 'No! Turn left Jolly, turn south.' He initiated the turn, and I was about to order him to climb when, as I passed on a strafe pass, I observed a fire suddenly break out between the middle of the left engine and the main rotor. Immediately pieces flew off of the tail rotor and struck the main rotor, causing it to disintegrate. Jolly Green 67 continued to roll left and crashed on his left side about 1 kilometer south of Nail 38 Bravo's [Lieutenant Clark's] position. Fire immediately spread throughout the aircraft. No beepers were ever heard.... The time was 1740." On the tactical frequency, Boli began calling: "Jolly's down! Jolly's down!"

Jolly Green 67 lay on its side, a heap of burning, smoking wreckage. It would continue to burn and smoke for several days, with intermittent explosions of the ordnance on board. The fire would become so hot that some of the metal would melt into the ground. There were no survivors and there would be no search and rescue attempt. Instead, the names of six more Americans--Chapman, Call, Prater, Pearson, Avery and Alley--were added to the mounting bill for Hambleton.

Boli conducted a roll call of his task force. All others were present. Captain Schibler, leading the two backup helicopters, monitored all of this and immediately began to move his two aircraft to the holding point, where he encountered the rest of the force. The two groups of aircraft quickly joined into

an orbiting aircraft and tried to sort out the disaster. All the pilots agreed that there were apparently no survivors of Jolly Green 67 and that another attempt to rescue Hambleton and Clark did not appear justified at that time, since there was still a strong enemy presence in the area.

As the task force leader, it was Boli's call. He agreed that the area was just too hot; they would abort the mission. Boli then turned on-scene command over to Captain Icke, with another list of targets to be struck, told the survivors to remain hidden, and accompanied his shaken force back to base.

Back at Da Nang, the men of the rescue forces were stunned by the tragic loss of Jolly Green 67 and its crew. Colonel Harris was very upset. The loss of Jolly Green 67 confirmed his earlier fears that the search area was just too dangerous for helicopters. Once again, Harris called Colonel Muirhead in Saigon; this time Harris told him that they had to find another way.

Muirhead agreed with Boli's decision and Harris' recommendations to terminate the rescue attempts by helicopter. He then notified his superiors that "all reasonable actions had been accomplished," and that the area was just too dangerous for a helicopter pickup.

In their hiding places near Cam Lo, the two survivors had been witnesses to Jolly Green's downing. Lieutenant Clark later recalled that there had been so much firing going on that he could not distinguish who was firing at whom. But as the Jolly Green passed over him heading south, he could tell that it was not gaining altitude. When he heard it crash, Clark was devastated. His immediate thought was: "I really cocked this up. Six more guys dying because I f---d up." And then the realization set in that he was not going to be picked up that day. Clark felt desperately lonely.

Colonel Hambleton--Bat 21 Bravo--cried for the six brave men who had lost their lives lost trying to save his own. Although he was tired, hungry and demoralized, the 53-year-old navigator resolved then and there, "Hell, I'm going to get out of this, regardless."

Hambleton and Clark did get out. But not by helicopter. No more of the vulnerable choppers would be sent in. Instead, a small ground team was dispatched commanded by U.S. Marine Lt. Col. Andy Anderson and led by Navy SEAL Lieutenant Tom Norris. Within a week, the team would infiltrate behind enemy lines to rescue the two downed flyers. It was a risky and dangerous mission, but it got done. The two lucky fliers returned home as heroes.

Nothing could be done, however, for the brave crew of Jolly Green 67. They were lost forever, part of the larger cost of the war. It would be 22 years before their remains would be found and returned to the United States.

Now a captain for Delta Airlines, Air Force Colonel Darrell D. Whitcomb logged 1,875 combat hours as a cargo pilot and FAC during the Vietnam War. Suggestions for further reading: The Rescue of Bat 21, by Darrell D.

Whitcomb (forthcoming); BAT-21, by William C. Anderson; and "SEALS Shadowy Rescue," by Dale Andrade. Vietnam Magazine, December 1990.

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HEROIC HUEY SEARCH-AN

2 APR 72

Blueghost 39, a UH-1H Huey, went into action to help rescue a downed Douglas EB-66 during the Eastertide Offensive—but the chopper's crew would soon need a search team of its own.

By Colonel Darrell D. Whitcomb,
U.S. Air Force Reserve

Fort Myer, Virginia, is not much of an army post as posts go. It is not the biggest in land area, nor is it home to any major combat units. But it does perform one very important mission for the Army and the nation. Located next to Arlington National Cemetery, the post serves as the sentinel for that most hallowed ground. Its personnel are constant participants in and witnesses to the interment of American men and women who have served their country near and far and have made the ultimate sacrifice.

April 29, 1994, was like most other days at Fort Meyer. Numerous burials were scheduled throughout the day, and

Directed by a Hughes OH-6 observation helicopter, Bell AH-1G Cobra gunships peel off to lay suppressive fire on Communist ground forces, in Chariots of Fire, by Joe Kline (Joe Kline Aviation Art).



flying near Hue. It was a UH-1H Huey (call sign Blueghost 39) from F Troop of the 8th Cavalry. Normally based at Marble Mountain air facility, near Da Nang, it was one of several aircraft that had been assigned to missions in the Hue-Quang Tri area that day. Blueghost 39's crew consisted of pilots 1st Lt. Byron Kulland and Warrant Officer John Frink, crew chief Spc. 5 Ronald Paschall and gunner Spc. 5 Jose Astorga.

On board Blueghost 39 as passengers were Captain Thomas White, the F troop operations officer, and Stu Kellerman, a reporter for United Press International. Earlier in the day, Blueghost 39 had taken Kellerman on an aerial tour of the Dong Ha area to get a firsthand view of the unfolding battle. While returning, they were instructed to swing by the Hue-Phu Bai area and pick up White for the return home to Marble Mountain air facility. There, the original Blueghost 39 co-pilot, Warrant Officer Guy Laughlin, changed aircraft with Frink, who had been the co-pilot on another F Troop Huey, Blueghost 30. Frink had already spent several days at Hue-Phu Bai and was scheduled to return to his home base for a few days of rest and relaxation. Blueghost 39 was his ride back.

The emergency call changed all of that. White briefly considered having the helicopter turn north and immediately proceed to Cam Lo. But the emergency call specified that there could be as many as six survivors. Captain White knew that six added to the crew of four, plus two passengers already on board, would overload the Huey. Besides, he could not risk the life of the reporter. So he directed the crew to drop him and Kellerman off at the Hue-Phu Bai tactical operations center, where he could monitor events by radio. White directed the helicopter crew to proceed to the Hue-Phu Bai airfield, refuel and be ready for action.

In the refueling pits, they were joined by two F Troop Bell AH-1G Cobra gunships, call signs Blueghost 28 and 24. Earlier in the day, the two Cobras had been working out of the Quang Tri airfield, a few miles to the east, when it had come under heavy NVA artillery fire. They had scrambled to save themselves and their aircraft and proceeded to Hue-Phu Bai for safety. The other Huey assigned to the unit, Blueghost 30, was also at the refueling pits. It was flown by Warrant Officer Ben Nielsen and had no specific assignment, but was on call for whatever might develop.

Based on what little he knew about the shot-down aircraft and the developing land battle, White directed Blueghost 28, piloted by Captain Mike Rosebeary, to immediately lift off with the other gunship, Blueghost 24, and one of the Hueys, Blueghost 39, and respond to the emergency call. Rosebeary acknowledged the call and took off with the three helicopters. White then called him in the air and said it appeared that six crew members from an Air Force aircraft were down north of Cam Lo. He instructed Rosebeary to contact an Air Force FAC, call sign Bilk 34, on the emergency "Guard" frequency to coordinate the rescue. White also informed Rosebeary that there were apparently massive enemy forces at that location, and directed him not to take his flight north of the river near Dong Ha without fighter support.

Five minutes later, White decided to augment the flight with the other Huey. He directed Blueghost 30 to take off and join the others in the effort and informed Rosebeary that the second Huey was being launched. Rosebeary then made a critical decision. Not realizing what he was getting into, he directed his second Cobra, Blueghost 24, to drop back and join up with the second Huey, which was actually just a few minutes behind. By doing so, he reduced by half the firepower he and Blueghost 39 would have when they reached the river.

Flying north, Rosebeary and his team checked in with Jankowski. The FAC gave them a cursory situation briefing and instructed them to proceed to Dong Ha, cross the river and head west to the one survivor who was located near where the river made a big bend back to the east. Rosebeary acknowledged the message but queried the FAC for further information on the NVA threat. Jankowski told them that there were "many, many" anti-aircraft guns in the area, but that A-1s and F-4s were already hitting them. Satisfied, Rosebeary committed his two lead helicopters to the rescue attempt.

Blueghosts 28 and 39 proceeded into the area at low altitude. Blueghost 39 was out front, 50 feet above the ground; Blueghost

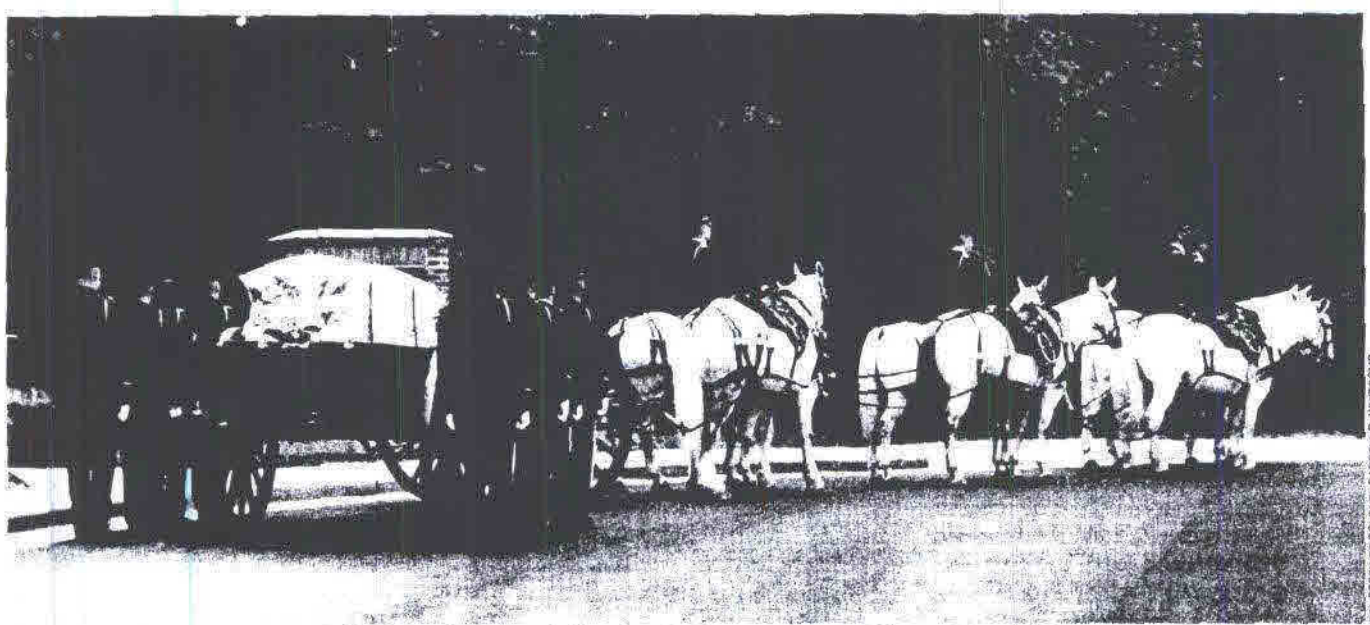


PHOTOS COURTESY OF COLONEL DARRELL O. WHITCOMB



LEFT: PASCHALL FAMILY; RIGHT: FRINK FAMILY

Clockwise from top left: First Lieutenant Byron Kulland, pilot of Blueghost 39, a Bell UH-1H of F Troop, 8th Cavalry; Captain Mike Rosebeary, pilot of the Bell AH-1G gunship Blueghost 28; Warrant Officer John Frink, who substituted for Blueghost 39's regular co-pilot, Warrant Officer Guy Laughlin; Specialist-5 Ronald Paschall, crew chief of Blueghost 39.



COURTESY OF COLONEL DARRELL D. WHITCOMB

A caisson carries the remains of Kulland, Frink and Paschall to their final resting place at Arlington National Cemetery on April 29, 1994—22 years after their deaths. Blueghost 39's gunner, Spc. 5 Jose Astorga, was wounded and taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese.

FAC and pointed the two damaged Skyraiders toward Da Nang. Lieutenant Jankowski was not far behind them.

As Jankowski and the Sandys headed for Da Nang, Jolly Green 67 landed at Hue-Phu Bai to drop off Rosebeary and Gorski. White was there to meet them. Just a few moments earlier, he had gotten a call from higher headquarters notifying him that two of his helicopters were down up north. The caller did not specify which two. When White heard that the Jolly Green was inbound, he hoped that his men were aboard.

Rosebeary and Gorski climbed out and told White what had happened. Even though it was now almost completely dark, White dispatched several other unit helicopters to Dong Ha to search for the downed crew. But the weather, darkness and enemy forces combined to make the effort fruitless.

Morse and his wingman landed at Da Nang. Both aircraft were so badly damaged they needed several days of repair work to be flyable again. They told intelligence officers about the dramatic events unfolding up north. Then Morse got on the phone and called his squadron commander at Nakhon Phanom Air Base in Thailand. He described the situation and said that they needed more A-1s at Da Nang. It was going to require an extensive effort to fish Colonel Hambleton out of the middle of the North Vietnamese Army. His commander replied that several A-1s would be dispatched that night to help.

Then Morse tried to get some sleep. He knew that tomorrow was going to be a very busy day, dangerous and difficult. But they had to rescue the downed flier. That was why they were there. They would do everything they could to get him out. As long as Hambleton was still alive and free, all efforts would be made to rescue him. But Morse could not doze off. The thought of the NVA guns haunted him. There were so many. Instead of sleeping, he either paced or shook the whole night. He said later that it was the worst night of his life.

Search-and-rescue forces returned to the area the next day to continue the effort to locate Hambleton. Elements of F Troop also continued to listen and search for Blueghost 39, but found no signs of the Cobra. The search went on for 11 more days, during which two more helicopters, two North American Rockwell OV-10s and one F-4 went down. Hambleton and one of the OV-10 crew members were eventually rescued by a combined U.S.-Vietnamese SEAL commando team.

The fierce ground battle continued. South Vietnamese forces eventually were able to halt and partially reverse the NVA offensive. But the crew of Blueghost 39, like so many others, had dis-

appeared. One year later, all remaining U.S. troops were withdrawn from Vietnam. U.S. participation in the war ended with the return of American prisoners, one of whom was Jose Astorga, the gunner on Blueghost 39. He could finally tell the tale of what happened April 2, 1972, when his crew attempted to rescue the downed Air Force navigator.

Three years later, in 1975, North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam again. But this time South Vietnam was alone; American air power was not there to help them by decimating the advancing NVA columns. South Vietnam fell, and many Americans just forgot the war and the warriors who fought it. But the families and compatriots of those lost never forgot and never lost hope that their friends and loved ones would eventually be returned to their home soil.

In the post chapel at Fort Myer on that spring day in 1994, friends and family welcomed home the three lost crew members of Blueghost 39. The previous August, a joint U.S.-Vietnamese search team, assembled as a reflection of the reopening of relations between the two nations, went to the crash site of Blueghost 39. The team eventually recovered the remains of Byron Kulland, John Frink and Ronald Paschall, which were shipped home under an American flag.

The commemorative service at Fort Myer was a touching ceremony. The pomp, the precision of the soldiers of the old 3rd Infantry, the snapping of the flag, the hymns—all were part of the tearful celebration as the Army chaplain led the congregation through several songs and readings in that historic chapel. After the ceremony, a caisson carried the common casket containing the sparse remains of all three men into the cemetery itself. The crew of Blueghost 39 was home at last. □

Now a captain for Delta Airlines, U.S. Air Force Colonel Darrell D. Whitcomb logged some 1,875 combat hours as a cargo pilot and Forward Air Controller in Southeast Asia. Suggestions for further reading: *The Rescue of Bat 21*, by Darrell D. Whitcomb (forthcoming); *BAT-21*, by William C. Anderson (Prentice-Hall/Bantam); and *"SEALs Shadowy Rescue,"* by Dale Andradé, *Vietnam Magazine*, December 1990.

To read Colonel Whitcomb's story of Air Force rescue efforts in the aftermath of Hambleton's shootdown, go to <http://www.thehistorynet.com> on the World Wide Web and see "Brave Jolly Green," which will be published starting the week of May 19, 1997, on TheHistoryNet.