

No Time for Heroics –
written by
Major Gerald Flynn, USAF, retired
King 25, Rescue Navigator

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Two HC-130 temporary duty yonder aircrews were tasked in classified T.S. 101 Ops-Plan, buildup of Combat Aircrew Recovery forces in Southeast Asia hostilities. We mustered at Clark Air Base, Philippines, initially briefed on our combat role, and attached to the 1600th Support Group Rescue Branch, 61st MAWg. It was off to the Fireside for a relaxing round of "Southern Comfort", which comes to my mind in the form of a "Maganda Filipina". That didn't happen; although, it was said, "the San Miguel (a cloudy, pale yellow, strongly hopped beer with a complex malt aroma, an excellent middle flavor and a very refreshing finish...) flowed and there was "hot tipping". Some of us were nervous (translated: scared) about combat.

The following day two aircrews were flown to Korat RTAFB, "Sawatdee, Mai Pen Rai", for instruction in a combat simulator, normally a 30-day checkout; completed in two 15-hour days. Everyone experienced monitoring three or more radios simultaneously and passing notes to cut-off interphone chatter, and familiarization with the SAR Book, procedures, and Rules of Engagement (ROEs). After deadhead return to Clark, we flew combat feet-wet orbit April 19th, 1972. Five days from "bottle to throttle", quietly providing critical rescues in the midst of the North Vietnamese "Nguyen Hue" Campaign. Our TDY crews played vital dual role in crucial efforts of airborne command post coordinating all strike and rescue forces between JRCC and OSC; additionally providing helicopter aerial refueling over the Gulf of Tonkin.

Circumstances: Enemy first introduced the shoulder-fired SA-7 missile, keeping Korat AMC HC-130s and aircrews orbiting over Thailand. The Easter Offensive increasing combat rescue missions, while emphasizing manning problem of continuing personnel reduction to coincide with withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam.

King 25 Mission Schedule:

0 dark: Thirty Briefing (0230L)

- Intelligence indicates an unguided heat-seeking missile launched near DMZ

into Phantom flight, pilot's evasive maneuvers averted collision.

- Daily Frag Order: King 25 East Orbit for first light; King 26 afternoon

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A flight of Army AH-1Hs, Passer 21 and 22, and UH-1H Hueys, Lotus and Coachman, respond: "King 25, Lotus flight of two Cobras and two Slicks are in vicinity and available. What is your situation?"

King 25 AC passes, "Roger, Thanks, Lotus, contact FAC, Covey 02 on this frequency for SAR briefing and directions to survivors positions." In short fashion Passer 21 and 22 locate and suppress enemy forces ground attack. Coachman comes in low and fast, making two pickups, rescuing not a Phantom crew, but two Hobo pilots.

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Meantime King 25 CP requests Hillsboro to send more Sandy and Fast Mover strikes to sanitize area for rescue attempt. Hillsboro responds, "Roger, King 25, we'll find some help!" "Thanks, Hillsboro, King 25 standing by," replies CP.

"Attention all aircraft, this is Hillsboro on GUARD, SAM, SAM, SAM south of Mu Gia Pass."

The Hobo shoot downs attributed to SA-7s, JOKER decides this area is still too hot to risk HH-53s. King 25 AC, again, radios Lotus flight and asks assistance for advisor team rescue. Well aware of tenuous hostile situation, Lotus agrees to immediate rescue of advisor group, and radios Covey 02 for survivors rendezvous location and recovery instructions. Covey 02 briefs instructions and passes a heads-up to Nail pilot evaders.

With Snakes defending the designated LZ, both Slicks come in for quick pickups. Three men run to lead Lotus and three to Coachman. Shortly after takeoff, Lotus takes a SA-7 up the tailpipe, exploding in mid-air, killing all aboard. Coachman lifts off, but during egress was hit by machine gun ground fire and crippled. Passer 21 and 22 swoop down and get the shooters, trading hits as they do, but too late. Coachman AC nurses the Slick out of immediate danger and crash-lands south of Quang Tri.

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The Huey suffers major damage; however, all walk away (good landing). Radio request for assistance passes through Covey 02 to King 25 to Air Ops at Camp Evans, Vietnam.

An OH-6A Little Bird is immediately available, but has limited seating, so everything is jettisoned for takeoff. Half an hour later, Blue Ghost recovers five tired, but happy survivors: two Hobo pilots, two Ranger advisors, plus Nail pilot held on, standing on the skids; delivering them to DaNang AB. Meanwhile the battle damaged Slick and crew limp to Camp Evans. "Whew..." Take a breath...

In Wing Commander Col. Sohle's words, "Of the many significant events... the one having the greatest overall impact on our operations was the April buildup in Southeast Asia to counter increased enemy hostilities. Our TDY of airframes and personnel into SEA and the Philippines was carried out in minimum time with optimum results. Almost immediately upon arrival of the augmenting forces, gratifying and daring combat aircrew recoveries took place"....

Sources: Adapted from de-classified USAF collection AFHRA: History, 41ARRWg, 1 Jan - 30 Jun '72, Colonel Frederick V. Sohle, Jr. - Commander; History, 3ARRGp, 1 Apr - 30 Jun '72; History, 1600th SGp (Rescue Branch), 1 Apr - 30 Jun '72; Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, 1999 Directory History; Author's recollections.

97d EASTER OFFENSIVE HC-130 STORY
BY FLYNN

Robert LaPointe

From:
Sent: Sunday, March 24, 2002 6:13 PM
To:
Subject: PJs in Vietnam - Volume II - DRAFT article: "No Time for Heroics"

FW: you wrote: Would you consider writing a segment on the role of King during the Easter Offensive. I could use some first hand HC-130 material ...

Dear, Bob,

Please, review this DRAFT article to see if it might fit the bill. I'm open to any and all suggestions! I've received no support as far as names, etc. so guess I'll leave it that way. You'll probably be able to better format this as you like. Reply for any changes, you'd like to see.

Do you have narratives for the following missions? A-3-035, 20 April 1972; A-3-036, 23 Apr; A-3-037, 24 Apr; A-3-040, 27 Apr; A-3-041, 28 Apr; A-3-042, 29 Apr; B-3-044, 25 May; A-3-050, 7 May; A-3-052, 19 May; A-3-054, 22 May, A-3-057, 26 May; - I can work on any of these that you'd like...

I'll be sending copies by snail-mail of research materials (Histories) for your documentation. Later, Jerry

P.S. Please send reply that you received this missive... ty

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- Intelligence indicates an unguided heat-seeking missile launched near DMZ into Phantom flight, pilot's evasive maneuvers averted collision.
- Daily Frag Order: King 25 East Orbit for first light; King 26 afternoon replacement, same position.
- HC-130 combat crew responsibilities:
 1. AC (Aircraft Commander) - everything - monitors radios, talks to Joker & OSC, gas passer extraordinaire for Buffs and Jollys.
 2. CP (Co-Pilot) - aircraft control / guidance / scanning - talks to ABCCC Hillsboro and fast movers.
 3. Nav (Navigator) - positioning / timing / fuel / documentation - slow mover orbit, talks to choppers.
 4. FE (Flight Engineer) - aircraft performance / fuel planning / scanning.
 5. RO (Radio Operator) - talks on HF: mission support - 3rdARRGp, FOL, MA / scanning.
 6. LM (Loadmaster) - weight and balance / cargo loading (in-flight lunches) / scanning.
 7. AMC (Airborne Mission Commander) - usually the AC, but occasionally carried second (AC or Nav) to lighten responsibility on AC.

King 25 Clark AB Launch @ 0430L (could be worse except for one hour earlier time zone)

Daylight @ 0600L King 25 on-station feet-wet, briefing rescue mission progress...

Happenings yesterday:

- Two OH-6s Cayuse shot down in Quang Tri Providence supporting SAR effort. Both crews successfully extracted.
- South Vietnamese fought until forced to retreat from Quang Tri. Advisor Ranger unit found an OV-10 FAC Nail pilot, shot down while directing strikes. After nightfall group of six, including downed pilot, hid surrounded by the enemy. The Nail pilot made "beeper" contact, relayed situation, requested CAS and morning rescue.
- Two HH-53s Buff fragged to first light Slow Mover holding point.

King 25 Tasking: coordinate rescue of advisor and Nail pilot group.

Current situation: Strike aircraft included two A1-Es Hobo working with Covey 02 to cool down area for rescue forces.

The briefing is interrupted by unknown caller on radio GUARD frequency, "Strella, Strella, Strella south of DMZ!"

Suddenly, over GUARD frequency, another voice cries, "F-4 has been shot down south of DMZ." Closely followed by a third call, "two good chutes."

Several minutes pass... Covey 02 radios, "King 25, I've lost communication with Hobo flight." AC replies, "Roger, Covey 02, we'll try them, too."

Break... Hobo, this is King 25 on Uniform, do you read?"

Then another GUARD call, "Chutes are on ground in clearing, and both pilots are running over open land closely pursued by enemy ground forces near Quang Tri."

King 25 AC quickly attempts radio contact on GUARD and FM with any Dust-off flight. Navy SH-3 "Big Mother" on a nearby carrier in the Gulf of Tonkin answers the emergency request, but AC relays that both survivors are overland, northwest of "Rocket City".

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Silence is broken abruptly - interphone button is keyed and Loadmaster asks, "NAV, what is this island just ahead?"

Oops... in sheer terror I push the red interphone call button, automatically drowning out all other radio transmissions and yell, "CO-PILOT, make an immediate right 180 turn to Channel 77; SCANNERS, clear left for MiGs from Dong Hoi or Triple-A from Hainan Island!!!"

Damnation... Rule one: Do flying job - don't get overly caught up with radio situation!!!

We know, luckily dodging a bullet that time, learning from experience and never, ever let it happen, again!!!

Relief King 26 arrives, we depart east feet-wet orbit @ 1215L

RO receives call from HH-3E #66-13289, "King 25, we need gas!" They are recovering on a sailor Med-Evac west of the PI. FE rechecks fuel tank quantities, while Nav updates fuel log. King 25 has enough gas. AC replies, "Roger, Jolly, give us a 10 second hold down on Uniform for intercept", but it becomes a non-combat loss... PJs weren't on our TDY crew; they remind us of what to do before leaving the scene... like closing the doors and leaving a light on...

King 25 lands Clark AB @1530L, our fantastic maintenance specialists immediately descend on the aircraft and quickly diagnose, find parts, and make needed adjustments and repairs. They are "the Greatest". Aircrew sweep confetti notepaper out of the cockpit, debrief, refuel & cock aircraft ready for another early morning launch (11.0+ hours flying daily).

At 1630L, the beloved Aircraft Commander calls, "Going into crew rest..." ("Yea, man, celebrate in Chambers Hall with a shot of 21 year old, Chivas Royal Salute Scotch Whisky (full-bodied and richly flavored, with a smooth and slightly sweet, lingering aftertaste...)", me thinks.

Challenges:

- Several times King 26 couldn't depart P.I. on time due to aircraft maintenance problems; King 25 remained on afternoon combat orbit.
- King 25 or 26 refueled Buffs from slow mover orbit.
- During extended rescue missions, King 25 refueled at Rocket City (Dung Binh.) before returning to the PI.
- Rotating flight schedules to keep from exceeding aircrew duty time.

Aircrew and Maintenance morale: most outstanding, everyone pulling load together, high stress duty, short-notice tasking, superb performance. Experienced, combat heads didn't realize they were talking, refueling, or working with TDY crews. Completing this high-risk period assisting over 150 combatants, giving warriors their greatest gift: "returning to the fray". Combat rescue is truly an "awesome, adrenalin rush"!

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FILE = TS-101-CLARK 72



FLYNN, GERALD