

18Jun72 Spectre 11

☰☛☰ TODAY IN SEA WAR HISTORY ➤ 18 June 1972

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In I Corps, Quang Tri Province:

The 16th Special Operations Squadron, based at Ubon, Thailand, flew the AC-130 SPECTRE gunship. On the night of 18 June 1972, an AC-130A Spectre gunship serial number 55-0043, hull nickname "Odin" - call sign "Spectre 11" launched on a night armed reconnaissance mission to attack NVA along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The crew consisted of 15 men:

Capt Paul F. Gilbert, pilot  
Capt Robert A. Wilson, co-pilot  
Maj Robert H. Harrison, navigator  
Maj Gerald F. Ayres, sensor operator  
Capt Mark G. Danielson, electronic warfare officer  
Capt Gordon L. Bocher, fire control officer, survivor  
2nd Lt Robert V. Reid, low light sensor operator, survivor  
TSgt Richard M. Cole, Jr., flight engineer  
SSgt Leon A. Hunt, aerial gunner  
SSgt Richard E. Nyhof, aerial gunner  
SSgt Larry J. Newman, aerial gunner  
MSgt Jacob E. Mercer, aerial gunner  
SSgt Stanley L. Lehrke, aerial gunner  
SSgt Donald H. Klinke, illuminator operator  
SSgt William B. Patterson, illuminator operator, survivor

Spectre 11 was conducting a night armed reconnaissance mission to attack elite NVA forces known to be infiltrating from Laos into South Vietnam along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Oscar Eight was the code name given to a sector of eastern Laos located in rugged jungle covered mountains, approximately 25 miles northwest of the infamous A Shau Valley, Saravane Province, Laos. The area encompassed the junction of Highway 92, which was a primary north-south artery of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and Highway 922 which branched off and ran directly east where it crossed into South Vietnam at a strategic point near the northern edge of the A Shau Valley. Oscar Eight was also located at the southeastern end of a large and narrow jungle covered valley that had two primary roads running through it, one on each side of the valley. Highway 92 ran along the west side and Highway 919 along the east. A power line ran parallel to Highway 92 and sometimes crossed it. In addition to the roads and power line, the Hoi An River also flowed through the valley passing the road junction roughly 1 mile west of it.

More American aircraft were downed in the vicinity of the junction of Highways 92 and 922 than any other place in Laos. This was because burrowed deep in the hills of Oscar Eight and located just to the east of the road junction was North Vietnamese General Vo Bam's 559th Transportation Group's forward headquarters. It was also the Ho Chi Minh Trail's control center as well as containing the largest NVA storage facility outside of North Vietnam. Oscar Eight was defended by consecutive belts of anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) guns of all sizes.

The AC-130's target was in mountainous terrain -- in a valley with hills around it that reached up 3,500 feet. At 2355 hours, Spectre 11 was making its second attack pass over the target area. An SA-7 Strela was fired from the side of one of the hills by the 36th Anti-Aircraft Battalion, Binh Tram 42.

Sgt William B. Patterson had the job of watching for missiles and AAA fire. He lay on the aft cargo door, actually hanging out into the airstream so he could get a good field-of-view below the aircraft. It was dark and Sgt Patterson spotted the tell-tale flash of light when the missile was fired. It arched up toward the aircraft in a smooth curving trajectory, the motor burning with an eerie blue-white light, holding straight to its course, not porpoising back and forth the way SA-7s usually flew. When the missile was 2-3 seconds away, the crew fired a decoy flare, but the SA-7 kept boring right in, hitting the right inboard #3 engine. There was a loud explosion and a flash of fire as the missile struck. Flames trailed 40+ feet behind the engine.

The aircraft shuddered, the nose rose slightly, then settled down and began a hard right turn.. The #3 engine separated from the wing. The flight engineer called on intercom that they were losing altitude, the pilots worked to pull her up. Capt Gilbert rang the egress bell. Someone else was calling out on the UHF radio that Spectre 11 had been hit by a missile. Personnel in three escorting F-4s observed the gunship break apart and descended in four large fireballs, missing what appeared to be the tail and right wing before it crashed and exploded in the rugged jungle covered mountains northwest of the A Shau Valley.

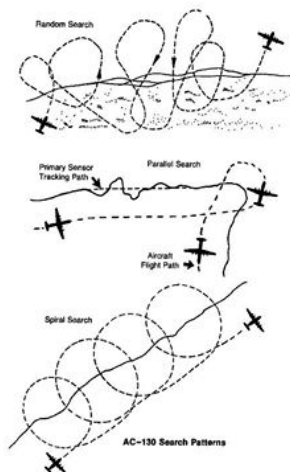
At least three men were thrown clear of the Spectre aircraft as it broke up and they parachuted safely to the ground. SSgt Patterson, an accomplished parachuter, grabbed his parachute after the SA-7 hit. While falling through the night sky, Patterson managed to strap himself into the harness and deploy his chute.

Although initial reports placed the crash location in Laos, subsequent SAR efforts (and later on-the-ground investigation) placed the location approximately 2 miles east of the South Vietnamese/Lao border, 2 miles northwest of the A Shau Valley; 3 miles southwest of Highway 548 (the primary road running generally northwest to southeast through the valley) 5 miles southeast of where Lao Highway 922 crossed the border into South Vietnam, 8 miles south of the junction between Highways 922 and 548 and 26 miles west-southwest of Hue. Some of the gunship's wreckage fell into the Village of A Hua, Loui District, Thua Thien Province, South Vietnam while the rest of it fell into adjacent jungle foliage.

US forces immediately heard multiple emergency 'beepers' on GUARD channel. The F-4 escort aircrew flight leader radioed Moonbeam, the EC-130 airborne battlefield command and control

center (ABCCC) notifying it of Spectre 11's loss and requested a search and rescue (SAR) mission.

At first light, SAR aircraft were on site. Capt Don Sutton and his crew in HH-53C Super Jolly Green Giant, s.n. 69-5787 were able to locate and recover 2nd Lt Robert Reid, Capt Gordon Bocher, and SSgt William Patterson.





[Bob Laymon](#) 🏠 🛠️ 📡 📞 In His Own Words – Then-Captain [Donald Sutton](#):

"We were on alert at Da Nang as Alpha Low when Spectre 11 was shot down. At the time, the 37th ARRS didn't have any night gear so the rescue attempt was going to be made at first light. We knew that there were at least 3 reported survivors which meant that there were 12 or so not accounted for. The location was in the A Shau Valley which had been a hot spot for many years.

We were led into the area by the Sandys and made a typical tree top, high speed run into the final position. We had the first survivor 'pop smoke' and got into a hover over his position. The Sandys put down some BLU- BLU-52 so we had our gas masks on during the operation.

FYI: (BLU-52 was a 'riot control' CS-based powder delivered in a 500 lb napalm tank by A-1 Skyraiders. BLU-52 was used in an attempt to reduce enemy movement in the area. It would temporarily incapacitate anyone that came into contact with it, including the survivor. Typically, the victim would experience burning eyes, draining sinuses, and nausea. The effects of BLU-52 were only temporary.)

I was pretty well nestled into the tree tops to try to maintain a low profile and I remember the Sandys saying that I could come up a little. Also remember thinking I was just fine where I was. I recall coughing a little bit during the rescue which meant that I didn't have my gas mask on tight enough because I must have been inhaling small amounts of the CS agent.

The Sandys flew a daisy chain around us, but I don't recall them having to suppress any enemy fire, but that may have been because I was too busy concentrating on getting the survivors on board as quickly as possible.

The survivors were all pretty close to each other so the time spent in a hover or at low speeds

getting to each one was pretty minimal. We did not take any small arms fire that we were aware of and didn't have to use our mini guns at all. The PJs and Flight Engineer did a great job of getting everybody on board and keeping their eyes out for any other hostile activity.

Our flight back to Da Nang was uneventful. We were obviously excited about rescuing three of the Spectre's crewmembers. But that excitement was muted quite a bit by the fact that we knew that the rest of the crew had been killed in the incident. This was the third Spectre that had been shot down within the last two and half months and we were hoping this would be the last.

As with most rescue attempts, you were never quite sure what was going to happen. We were prepared for the worst, but thankfully this one turned out to be pretty benign. As always, I had supreme confidence in my crewmembers, the Sandys around me, and the rest of the SAR participants. Everybody was going to do their absolute best to see that we got the survivors safely back to Da Nang.

I don't have the names of the 3 crewmembers that the team rescued, but I hope they went on to have great careers in the Air Force or in civilian life. I'm sure that day will be etched in their minds forever, as it is in mine."

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Although the SAR efforts continued for six days, no trace of the rest of the crew was found. A ground search was not possible due to the intense enemy presence in the region. When the formal search was terminated, the remaining 12 crewmen were declared Missing in Action.

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Bob Laymon said he was with you and 3 others at [Quang Tri Province](#).

Bob wrote: "🇺🇸 TODAY IN SEA WAR HISTORY ➤ 18 June 1972 In I Corps, Quang Tri Province: The 16th Special Operations Squadron, based at Ubon, Thailand, flew the AC-130 SPECTRE gunship. On the night of 18 June 1972, an AC-130A Spectre gunship serial number 55-0043, call sign "Spectre 11" launched on a night armed reconnaissance mission to attack NVA along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The crew consisted of 15 men: Capt Paul F. Gilbert, pilot Capt Robert A. Wilson, co-pilot Maj Robert H. Harrison, navigator Maj Gerald F. Ayres, sensor operator Capt Mark G. Danielson, electronic warfare officer Capt Gordon L. Bocher, fire control officer, survivor 2nd Lt Robert V. Reid, low light sensor operator, survivor TSgt Richard M. Cole, Jr., flight engineer SSgt Leon A. Hunt, aerial gunner SSgt Richard E. Nyhof, aerial gunner SSgt Larry J. Newman, aerial gunner MSgt Jacob E. Mercer, aerial gunner SSgt Stanley L. Lehrke, aerial gunner SSgt Donald H. Klinke, illuminator operator SSgt William B. Patterson, illuminator operator, survivor Spectre 11 was conducting a night armed reconnaissance mission to attack elite NVA forces known to be infiltrating from Laos into South Vietnam along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Oscar Eight was the code name given to a sector of eastern Laos located in rugged jungle covered mountains, approximately 25 miles northwest of the infamous A Shau Valley, Saravane Province, Laos. The area encompassed the junction of Highway 92, which was a primary north-south artery of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and Highway 922 which branched off and ran directly east where it crossed into South Vietnam at a strategic point near the northern edge of the A Shau Valley. Oscar Eight was also located at the southeastern end of a large and narrow jungle covered valley that had two primary roads running through it, one on each side of the valley. Highway 92 ran along the west side and Highway 919 along the east. A power line ran parallel to Highway 92 and sometimes crossed it. In addition to the roads and power line, the Hoi An River also flowed through the valley passing the road junction roughly 1 mile west of it. More American aircraft were downed in the vicinity of the junction of Highways 92 and 922 than any other place in Laos. This was because burrowed deep in the hills of Oscar Eight and located just to the east of the road junction was North Vietnamese General Vo Bam's 559th Transportation Group's forward headquarters. It was also the Ho Chi Minh Trail's control center as well as containing the largest NVA storage facility outside of North Vietnam. Oscar Eight was defended by consecutive belts of anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) guns of all sizes. The AC-130's target was in mountainous terrain -- in a valley with hills around it that reached up 3,500 feet. At 2355 hours, Spectre 11 was making its second attack pass over the target area. An SA-7 Strela was fired from the side of one of the hills by the 36th Anti-Aircraft Battalion, Binh Tram 42. Sgt William B. Patterson had the job of watching for missiles and AAA fire. He lay on the aft cargo door, actually hanging out into the airstream so he could get a good field-of-view below the aircraft. It was dark and Sgt Patterson spotted the tell-tale flash of light when the missile was fired. It arched up toward the aircraft in a smooth curving trajectory, the motor burning with an eerie blue-white light, holding straight to its course, not porpoising back and forth the way SA-7s usually flew. When the missile was 2-3 seconds away, the crew fired a decoy flare, but the SA-7 kept boring

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