

25Jun72 from FE Harry Cash

Harry Cash

On this day in history, 25 June 1972, 43 years ago, while assigned to the 40th Air Rescue & Recovery Squadron (ARRS), during Operation Linebacker, North Vietnam. we were notified that a jet fighter had been shot down in North Vietnam, North of Hanoi and the Red River. The most dangerous area in Vietnam for any aircraft, twice that for helicopters. I was on alert with Capt Doug McGraw, Pilot, 1Lt Ben Casey, Co-Pilot, and PJ's Bill Webber and Chuck McGrath. There was also a combat photog. with us, but I don't remember his name. We got airborne about 0400 in the morning for a 4 hour flight to the area of operations. we'd have to fly north out of NKP Thailand, across Laos into NVN. That's not just point A to B. We will have to dodge and weave through Anti-Aircraft Weapons all the way. Before arriving in the area, we had to air refuel. After filling up we headed across the Black River south of Hanoi. Unlike South Vietnam with jungle, NVN is rolling farm land with nowhere to hide. We made our way to the China border near a mountain range and stayed just over the tree tops to avoid radar and MiG patrol. We started to get beeper signals from his survival radio but he wouldn't come up voice to ID himself. We won't commit ourselves until he authenticates. Early in the war, the enemy would use captured radios to be on and set up positions to shoot us down when we responded. So lessons learned we set up an auth. system and taught to all crewmembers in survival school. Every 3 hours we would have to go air-refuel. We went the same route each time to a safe area south of the Black River because we didn't want our tanker to be in harms way. We'd been airborne 12 hours and this will be our 5th refueling. This time it was a "bridge too far" As we started across the river all hell broke out from the south shore, ground fire everywhere. We did a sharp left U turn and they opened up from the north shore. We continue our turn back to the south to blast our way through. We had all three mini-guns firing and as the pilot did a quick left bank to avoid a rocket bullets ripped through the left side of the chopper. As I was firing from my right door gun position, I was hit in my right buttock and through the left side of my stomach. The impact buckled my knees and another round hit me in the right side stomach, another on my right thigh. When my knees buckled, I became disconnected from my intercom. I reached over to Bill and pointed to my intercom. He connected me and I told him I'd been hit. How bad is it I asked? It's bad he said. The skipper was doing everything in his power to keep us airborne but we were too damaged. We made it across the river and into Laos before our rotor blades began clipping tree branches. We crash landed in a clearing near a place called Lima site 16, An Air America secret site. By this time, I was in bad shape and 400 miles into enemy territory. I told Bill to give me a cigarette and keep me awake. If I go to sleep, I'll never wake again. Our wingman got in to get us out and one of the PJ's gave me some morphine. I remember seeing a movie as a kid "God as my Co-pilot." Well, my co-pilot came through for me as I have O-NEG blood and I can only have O Neg. My co-pilot had o-neg and gave me a direct transfusion on the way back to Thailand. They kept me awake all the way to Thailand and I was not in pain due to the morphine. I was in the hospital in Udorn Thailand for 6 weeks then MEDEVAC'ed to Langley AFB Va. After several more operations and 13 months later I was discharged from the hospital in July 1973. After a 30 day leave, I reported to the 55th ARRS at Eglin AFB FL for requalification training. I requalified in Sep of 1973 and reported to the 40th ARRS, NKP, Thailand in May 1974. As they say, the rest is history.