

MILITARY AIRLIFT COMMAND NOMINEE FOR

THE KITTY HAWK MEMORIAL AWARD

CAPTAIN DALE E. STOVALL

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Captain Dale E. Stovall is a 29-year old native of Toppenish, Washington. He graduated and received his commission from the United States Air Force Academy in 1967. While at the Academy, Captain Stovall served on the Cadet Group Staff and made the Superintendent's list for academic and military excellence. He was a 3-year Letterman in track, qualifying for the 1966 All-American Indoor Track Team.

Upon completion of pilot training in 1968, Captain Stovall flew the C-141 Starlifter for the Military Airlift Command. In 1970, he transitioned to the HH-53C "Super Jolly Green Giant" helicopter and was assigned to Patrick AFB, Florida, where he flew on the Launch Site Recovery Team for Apollo 14 and Apollo 15 space flights. In January of 1972, Captain Stovall was assigned to the 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, Nakhon Phanom AFB, Thailand, as a Rescue helicopter pilot.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Captain Dale Stovall compiled one of the finest combat records in Southeast Asia as an aircraft commander of an HH-53C "Super Jolly Green Giant" Rescue helicopter. His decorations include the Air Force Cross (the nation's second highest decoration), two Silver Stars, and two Distinguished Flying Crosses. He made 12 combat saves of downed aircrewmembers during his year tour, one of the highest individual saves totaled by one pilot. Captain Stovall flew on 18 actual combat rescue missions, including five into North Vietnam, and led two of the deepest penetrations into North Vietnam, north of Hanoi, ever attempted by a rescue crew. Two missions in particular, for which he was awarded the Air Force Cross and the Silver Star, highlight the bravery and determination of Captain Stovall in rescuing downed airmen from certain capture or death.

On the first of June 1972, Captain Stovall was flying the lead helicopter on a precautionary rescue orbit in northern Laos when he received word that an American airman, Captain Rodger Locher, had radioed from deep in North Vietnam that he had been on the ground since the tenth of May, 22 days before, when he was shot down by a MIG aircraft. Although the rescue force felt that it was a ploy to lure the slow moving helicopters into a trap, they elected to proceed into North Vietnam. After flying 110 miles into North Vietnam, the rescue force of two helicopters and two A-1H Sandy aircraft stopped at the edge of the famed

Red River, just eight miles from North Vietnam's Yen Bai Airfield that based over 70 MIGs. At that time, the enemy reacted with numerous surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), antiaircraft and small arms fire. Because of the enemy reaction and confusing directions given by Captain Locher, the rescue force was unable to locate Captain Locher. During 45 minutes of searching, the two "Jolly Green Giant" helicopters were twice attacked by a MIG-21 jet fighter, but the rescue force only terminated the search efforts when they had reached critically low fuel level.

The following day, Captain Stovall lead an all-volunteer mission back into North Vietnam on a second attempt. This time the rescue force of two "Jolly Green Giant" helicopters and four A-1H Sky Raiders was supported by dozens of other aircraft. After reaching the Red River Valley, the rescue force again was subjected to violent enemy reaction, but after locating the downed airman, they elected to continue and press deeper into North Vietnam across the Red River Valley. This placed the MIG airfield between themselves and safety. The rescue force had proceeded 130 miles into North Vietnam, just 30 miles north of Hanoi. Just prior to crossing the Red River Valley, the rescue force learned that their fighter protection against MIG aircraft had to leave because of low fuel. At this point, Captain Stovall, the aircraft commander in the helicopter that was to attempt the pick up, had the choice to continue or turn back. He immediately radioed that he would not turn back without the survivor.

Although the rescue force was still suspicious that they might be entering an enemy trap, Captain Stovall faced the task of hovering the big helicopter perfectly still while the downed airman was hoisted aboard. After spotting Captain Locher's signal smoke, Captain Stovall expertly flew his helicopter into a hover over the survivor, as he had previously done for nine other downed airmen in hostile areas. A stream of rifle fire erupted from a nearby village toward the motionless helicopter. Captain Stovall continued to hold his hover and give directions to the A-1H Sky Raiders to strike the enemy gun positions while his own helicopter crewmen returned the fire.

Following the successful pick up, a MIG-17 jet fighter attacked the rescue force as they were crossing the Red River Valley. They were able to evade it as well as the antiaircraft guns that were directed at the low flying rescue force. After 3 hours and 45 minutes in North Vietnam, Captain Stovall and his force reached the relative safety of northern Laos, completing one of the epic rescues of the Vietnam conflict. Captain Rodger Locher had evaded capture for 23 days, and his rescue was the second deepest penetration into North Vietnam by a rescue helicopter.

Just 25 days later, on the 27th of June 1972, Captain Stovall again flew into North Vietnam to save two American aircrewmembers from certain death or capture. Two U. S. fighters had been shot down while flying cover for a rescue force and one of the pilots had been severely injured upon ejection from his aircraft. He was lying helpless on the ground, unable to move. The enemy had sent armed search parties to hunt for the four downed airmen and had captured two of the Americans when the rescue force arrived.

Captain Stovall was the aircraft commander of the back-up helicopter, to be used if any of the rescue force went down. The first helicopter came into a hover and lowered a pararescueman, a trained medic, to the ground to assist the injured pilot. The hovering helicopter immediately came under a withering fire from several directions, receiving extensive battle damage. The crew was forced to sheer the rescue hoist cable and leave the area. Captain Stovall then made the decision to attempt the pick up (knowing that his aircraft and crew would surely be hit by enemy fire). The alternative was to abandon the pararescueman and pilot. Without hesitation, he made a dash into the area and maneuvered his "Jolly Green Giant" helicopter in position to give his own gunners an opportunity to return the enemy's fire. They were able to silence all enemy fire except that which was being directed at the cockpit and open door through which the two airmen would enter. Captain Stovall held the helicopter in a hover above the 100-foot jungle trees for 12 minutes while the two airmen were hoisted aboard. During this time the aircraft took numerous hits just behind Captain Stovall's seat, within one foot of his head. Yet he held the big helicopter motionless while the two men were threaded up through the jungle tree canopy. Captain Stovall then flew his damaged helicopter to safety.

In addition to flying on every all-volunteer mission, Captain Stovall also held the position of assistant operations officer of his unit. In this position he developed the detailed plans for rescue missions that sometimes involved as many as 100 aircraft.

Captain Stovall displayed the leadership, bravery, and determination that placed him in that special group of pilots that truly believe in the motto of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service, "That Others May Live."

1972 (cont)

- 1 May 72 Evacuation of Quang Tri. The 3d ARR Group evacuated 132 persons from the citadel in the besieged city of Quang Tri to Da Nang, Vietnam. Five HH-53s of the 37th ARR Squadron were used for this mission. No one was injured, despite the nearby presence of enemy forces. Staff Sergeant Robert L. LaPointe, a pararescue-man in the first HH-53, silenced enemy snipers with a mini-gun. When the plane landed, Sergeant LaPointe organized the evacuees and maintained ground control until the second HH-53 departed.
- 11 May 72 General John D. Ryan, USAF Chief of Staff, directed that the mission of ARRS be primarily oriented toward combat rescue operations.
- 1 Jun-
2 Jun 72 The 3d ARR Group, augmented by A-1s and other forces, rescued Captain Roger C. Locher, who had lost his F-4 over North Vietnam on 10 May and had evaded capture for 23 days. Captain Dale E. Stovall, 40th ARR Squadron, and his HH-53 crew successfully evacuated Captain Locher on 2 June. New electronic locator finder (ELF) equipment aided in the success of this operation.
- 27 Jun 72 Captain Stovall, 40th ARR Squadron, again flew deep into North Vietnam to rescue two downed airmen. After another HH-53 was forced to withdraw from the rescue site due to enemy fire, Captain Stovall's crew descended and retrieved the two survivors. The second HH-53 received more than 16 hits during the engagement, and several personnel aboard both HH-53s were wounded. Later, Captain Dale E. Stovall and Staff Sergeant Charles D. McGrath (pararescueman) were awarded the Air Force Cross.
- 6 Oct 72 General John D. Ryan, USAF Chief of Staff, ordered a sizeable reduction in the number of ARRS local base rescue elements and detachments during Fiscal Year 1973.
- Oct-
Nov 72 The 71st ARR Squadron joined with elements of other agencies in the search for House Majority Leader Hale Boggs, Congressman Nick Begich, and two other men, who disappeared in Alaska during a flight between Anchorage and Juneau. Despite a 40-day search, no trace was found.
- 2 Dec-
3 Dec 72 Three HC-130s and two HH-3s from the 31st ARR Squadron hoisted 29 Philippine sailors and one pet orangutan from lifeboats after their logging ship, the *San Martin*, sank about 500 miles east northeast from the Island of Luzon. Twenty-nine plus saves.
- 21 Dec 72 The 40th ARR Squadron performed its first night combat recovery in Southeast Asia by an HH-53 using a new Night Recovery System.



ARRS pilot awarded AF Cross

SCOTT AFB, Ill. — An Air Force rescue helicopter pilot from here was presented recently three military decorations for action in Southeast Asia, including the Air Force Cross, the nation's second highest military award.

Capt. Dale E. Stovall, now assigned to the ARRS headquarters at Scott, was presented the Air Force Cross, his second Silver Star and the Air Medal by Gen. Paul K. Carlton, Commander, Military Airlift Command, also with headquarters at Scott.

Captain Stovall was presented the Air Force Cross for the successful rescue of a downed American airman deep in hostile territory. As an HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter pilot, Captain Stovall volunteered for a second attempt after the first day's efforts were thwarted by hostile aircraft and missiles. Determined to save the F-4 Phantom crewmember, he willingly returned to the highly defended area, braving intense ground fire, and successfully recovered the airman. Captain Stovall received the first oak leaf cluster to the Silver Star for a similar attempt to recover another F-4 crewmember.

13 selected for Colonel

A total of 13 selectees have been named to the ARRS colonel promotion list in the secondary and primary zones.

Those selected in the primary zone were: Clifford E. Brandon, 41st ARRWg.; Richard F. Burdett, 1550th ATTWg.; Robert T. Dobson, HQ ARRS; Morgan A. Downing, 41st ARRWg.; Ned G. Duffield, 41st ARRWg.; Donald R. Gibson, 40th ARRWg.; William D. Hosking, Hq ARRS; and Billy R. McGee, 41st ARRWg.

Those selected in the secondary zone were: Nel L. Cagle, 41st ARRWg.; Alton H. Deviney, 41st ARRWg.; Frederic H. Donuhue, 39th ARRWg.; Paul Gerblich, 39th ARRWg.; and George H. Gibson Jr., 1550th ATTWg.

During the attempt, a PJ was lowered to the ground on a cable and a hoist from a hovering helicopter to assist the injured survivor. Intense ground fire disabled the hoist, forcing the helicopter pilot to cut the cable and move away, leaving both the survivor and the PJ on the ground. Captain Stovall, piloting a second Jolly Green, immediately recovered both men wounded from the enemy ground fire.

Captain Stovall received the Air Medal for recovering eight out of the fifteen AC-130 gunship crewmembers who went down in Southern Laos. Captain Stovall and his crew made the successful rescue in a 34-minute period.



Brig. Gen. Glenn R. Sullivan, new ARRS commander.
(see page 4)

Sgt. McGrath wins AF Cross

HICKAM AFB, Hawaii— An Air Force pararescueman assigned to the 6594th Test Group here has been awarded the Air Force Cross for conspicuous heroism in combat.

Sgt. Charles D. McGrath was presented the Air Force's second highest medal for his heroism against hostile forces while rescuing the downed pilot of an Air Force F-4 jet aircraft.

Sergeant McGrath was lowered by cable from a hovering Air Rescue helicopter to retrieve the injured pilot.

After locating the injured man, he carried him, amid intense enemy ground fire, to a clearing in a bamboo forest. Sergeant McGrath shielded the injured pilot with his own body as they were hoisted aboard the rescue helicopter. While suspended beneath the helicopter, the injured pilot was wounded by enemy fire, as well as a pararescueman who

was assisting the men from the door of the helicopter.

Once inside the rescue helicopter, Sergeant McGrath rendered life-sustaining medical treatment to the pilot and the wounded pararescueman during the flight back to a base in Thailand.

The commander-in-chief of the Pacific Air Forces, (PACAF) Gen. Lucius D. Clay, Jr., awarded Sergeant McGrath the heroism medal in ceremonies held here.

Harmon International Trophy

Longest flight earns nomination

Twelve 57th Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron crewmembers, who last year established a world's record for the longest unrefueled flight nonstop by turbo-prop aircraft, recently were nominated for the 1973 Harmon International Trophy (Aviator Category).

The historic flight covered a distance of 8,790.5 miles from Ching Chuan Kuan AB, Taiwan, to Scott AFB, Ill. Thus they eclipsed the old record of 6,842.5 miles set by a U.S. Navy Lockheed P-3 Orion aircraft which flew from Atsugi, Japan, to Patuxent River, Md., in January

1971.

The Harmon International Trophy, a symbolic bronze statue, includes four awards—one for aviator, one for astronaut, one for aviatrix and one for spherical balloonist.

The award is given annually for the "most outstanding international achievement in the art/science of aeronautics for the preceding year, with the art of flying receiving first consideration."

Selection for the award is made by the Harmon Selection Committee and is awarded by the trustees of the

Clifford Harmon Trust Fund.

Those included in the award winning flight are: Lt. Col. Edgar L. Allison, aircraft commander; Maj. Anthony V. Liparulo, pilot; Maj. Kenneth S. Wayne, flight surgeon; Capt. Carl E. Bennett, navigator; Capt. David E. Gardner, pilot; Capt. Richard E. Racette, pilot; TSgt. Robert K. Landry, crew chief; TSgt. Morelle E. Larouche, flight engineer; TSgt. William F. Litton, flight engineer; TSgt. Theodore F. Trainer, loadmaster; SSgt. Pat E. Carrothers, radio operator and SSgt. William L. Hippert, radio operator.

Former Jolly pilot Wins Valor Award

WASHINGTON (AFNS) — A former HH-3 Jolly Green Giant commander, Lt. Col. Joseph F. Mudd, was presented the 1971 Aviators' Valor Award by the American Legion in New York recently.

Now a member of the 22nd Bomb Wing, March AFB, Calif., Colonel Mudd won the award for actions as commander of a Jolly Green Giant in rescuing a survivor of a downed Air Force A-1 Skyraider in Vietnam March 6, 1971.

During the action, one of the two Skyraiders which were assisting him in rescuing survivors from a downed Army UH-1 was hit by enemy forces.

Within seconds Colonel Mudd placed his Jolly Green in a high-speed descent to a position over the pilot and hoisted him to safety.

According to the citation accompanying the Aviators' Award, Colonel Mudd, "without benefit of prior reconnaissance, escort, or groundfire suppression, rescued a U.S. Air Force pilot from certain death or capture by a hostile armed force."

A 1954 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy with 120 combat missions, Colonel Mudd was born in Detroit.

34,000 awards for

ARRS since 1965

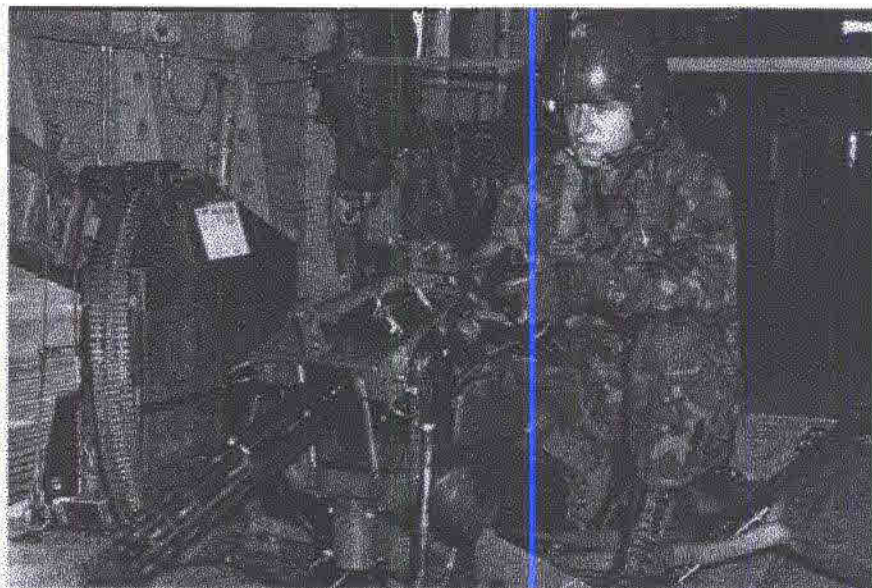
Between Jan. 1, 1965 and Dec. 31, 1972, the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service was lauded by approximately 34,000 awards and decorations. Not included are those citations which are still pending. Included in the list were four Presidential Unit Citations, five Vietnamese Crosses for Gallantry with Palms and five Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards.

Individual decorations included: one Medal of Honor, 38 Air Force Crosses, over 600 Silver Stars and more than 6,000 Distinguished Flying Crosses.

Pararescueman Sgt McGrath was lowered from his helicopter on June 27, 1972, to rescue a badly wounded pilot downed in North Vietnam. He dragged the pilot to the recovery site, but the helicopter was hit by hostile fire, leaving the two men stranded. Using his rescue training, Sgt McGrath calmly directed air support to hold off the enemy until another rescue chopper arrived. When the rescue helicopter reached them, Sgt McGrath shielded the wounded pilot from enemy fire until they were safely inside.

Sgt. Charles D. McGrath

Pararescueman Sgt. Charles D. McGrath with the 40th ARRS was lowered from HH-53 Super Jolly Green 73 on June 27, 1972, to rescue a badly wounded F-4 pilot downed in North Vietnam. He dragged the pilot through thick brush to the recovery site, but the helicopter was hit by hostile fire and lost its hoist, leaving the two men stranded. When another rescue chopper arrived, McGrath got the wounded pilot ready and rode up the hoist with him amid gunfire. Once safely inside, McGrath treated both the F-4 pilot and another PJ whose leg had been shattered by the gunfire.



Sergeant Charles D. McGrath

Incident date: 27 June 1972

Aircraft position: Pararescue Technician

Place of incident: North Vietnam

Unit: 40 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRS)

Location of unit: Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand

Synopsis: On 26 and 27 June 1972, the 40 ARRS was working to rescue two downed F-4 crews. "Valiant 03" and "Valiant 04," from deep inside North Vietnam. Sergeant Charles McGrath was on "Jolly Green 73," an HH-53 helicopter. "Valiant 03 Alpha" had already been recovered. At the holding point, "Jolly 73" joined with "Jolly 57." "Valiant 04 Alpha" was located some 2.5 miles inside the North Vietnam border. It was learned at the holding point that "Valiant 04 Alpha" had received a broken leg, knee, elbow, and jaw. Sergeant McGrath prepared his equipment to go down on the ground for the pilot. "Jolly 73" began its search and located the survivor. They put Sergeant McGrath on the ground to locate and assist the survivor, Captain Lynn A. Aikman. On the ground, Sergeant McGrath could see Captain Aikman laying on his back. When he arrived at his side he realized the tree beside Captain Aikman was too high and big to do a hoist. At this point, Sergeant McGrath dragged Captain Aikman 120 feet through the bushes to a safe place to perform a hoist. In the meantime, "Jolly 73" had taken ground fire and lost their hoist. They were able to climb out and recover. "Jolly 57" immediately came in to pick up the PJ and survivor. "Jolly 57" also received ground fire during the hoist. Just

near Laos-NVN boarder

One chopper, ill, maneuvered a single penetrator and airman and running low on fuel. Two other choppers were searching for the chopper in the day, the on-scene rescue attempt. The second man was hit.

(The fighters) and by suppressing the enemy continually. The HH-53 went down to be. The chopper had trouble with engine growth.

"When I got a glimpse of his parachute on the side of the hill, I told the guys to put me on the ground so I could get to him," said Sgt. Charles McGrath, one of the two PJs on the chopper. "I was about two feet away from him before he actually saw me," the PJ said.

While McGrath was on the ground, the HH-53 was damaged by ground fire and began losing its hydraulic utility power which operates the penetrator.

The Super Jolly commander, Maj. Lee W. Thacker Jr., decided to jettison the cable so he could get his aircraft away from the heavy small arms fire it was receiving.

When the damaged HH-53 moved out, Capt. Dale E. Stovall and his crew moved their Super Jolly in and lowered its penetrator to Aikman and McGrath.

"As we moved close to the helicopter, I could see ground fire putting holes in its side around the door," McGrath said.

McGrath and Aikman boarded Super Jolly safely and the SAR force returned home.

Sgt. David Cole breaks the language barrier with a hotdog.



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prior to getting Captain Aikman and Sergeant McGrath into the helicopter, another PJ, TSgt Dennis Reich, was hit as he was trying to get the men on board the aircraft. The combat photographer, SSgt Kelly Schuman, helped the Flight Engineer get the survivors into the aircraft. "Jolly 57" pulled out and made it up to join with "Jolly 73." "Jolly 73" had a severe fuel leak and needed to refuel ASAP. "King 27," an HC-130P, answered the call along with "King 22." Sergeant McGrath immediately began treating TSgt Reich, who was bleeding profusely from the bullet wound in the leg. He applied a temporary tourniquet to get control of the bleeding. Another PJ took over treatment on TSgt Reich, while Sergeant McGrath worked on Captain Aikman. On physical exam of Captain Aikman, the PJ noticed a hole in the pilot's boot. Looking closer, Sergeant McGrath realized that Captain Aikman had been shot through the foot during the hoist when they were nearing the door of the aircraft. The patients were delivered to definitive medical care. (8:--)

Captain Charles D. McGrath (retired) was awarded the Air Force Cross for his heroism.

See TABs J and L for reference material

The hoist had been shot out of action. Nothing for the two men in the underbrush to do but watch as the *Jolly Green* left without them.

OK OF THE RISH

by Sgt. JERRY W. KENNEDY

A1C Chuck McGrath was lonesome.

He wasn't alone, but he was lonesome. Hundreds of enemy troops filling the air with bullets weren't really much company. Nor could he talk to Capt. Lynn D. Aikman, the injured F-4 pilot he had come to rescue. Aikman was hurting badly. Besides, chatter might give their position away.

The going had been rough on this rescue from the start, but Pararescueman McGrath almost had success in his flight suit pocket.

McGrath had signaled to the HH-53 rescue helicopter overhead to lower the penetrator, which would haul the two men up to safety.

"We can't use the hoist!" came the bad news from Flight Engineer Sgt. George Wright. "It's frozen up. All the lines to the system have been shot out."

Another helicopter would have to come for McGrath and Aikman. Now there was nothing to do but wait. And hope.

It was June 1972, in Southeast Asia. The big air war was on, and there was a lot of business for Chuck McGrath and all the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery crews based in Thailand.

The Aikman rescue mission had begun with the dispatch of two HH-53s. One of them developed trouble. Then the other, the bird McGrath was on, had a malfunction and diverted to Udorn. Problems solved, it took off again.

Another chopper, this one from Nakhon Phanom, rendezvoused with them for the rescue mission.

On the way north, the HH-53 *Super Jolly Green Giant* refueled from *King Bird*, an HC-130 tanker.

Now everything was set. The *Jolly Greens* had M-60 machine guns along for double duty: to back up the three 7.62 mini-guns, and to cover the flight engineer while he's in the door during the rescue (you have to pull the mini-gun out of the way).

At the initial holding point, the

Rotten luck. The men watched from the underbrush as the *Jolly Green* left without them.

McGrath popped some smoke to make sure the *Sandys* and the other HH-53s knew their position. He didn't get much red smoke, but it was probably just as well. "The bad guys would have had a better target to shoot at. Fortunately, they weren't pinging around me. They were concentrating on the chopper."

Within minutes, another chopper came in, this one a Nakhon Phanom bird. The penetrator lowered, and McGrath got Aikman ready.

"I got us strapped on and pulled on the cable to signal that we were ready." As they rose toward the rescue bird, McGrath could see the engineer standing in the door. It was SSgt. Richard Simon, "a big guy with a cheerful face," McGrath recalled. "I could just see that big head hanging out. He didn't budge, not a bit."

The guns continued the heated exchange as McGrath and Aikman came level with the bottom of the aircraft.

"I could see the holes opening up in the side of the aircraft. *Ping, ping, ping*, right up the side," McGrath said.

"Simon still didn't move. Finally, they got us to the top and reached to pull us in. We almost got into the helicopter when all of a sudden we swung back out."

Another PJ, TSgt. Dennis Reich, had been helping to get them aboard and now he was hit. Within seconds, however, a combat photographer, SSgt. Kelly Schuman, jumped to operate the hoist while Simon pulled McGrath and Aikman in.

They had made it. But McGrath's work had only just begun. He unhooked and saw Reich lying motionless. "I pulled off his mask, and he opened his eyes," McGrath said. He noted that Reich had been hit in the leg and the bullet had shattered the bone. "I took the tourniquet out of the survival vest and put it on real quick. It was

precautionary, because there was a lot of blood coming out."

Aikman was still on the penetrator on the floor and he wanted off. McGrath checked him over and gave him some water.

Sgt. Mike Nunes, the tail gunner, Schuman, and McGrath put the two men on stretchers.

Nunes worked on Reich and McGrath stayed with Aikman.

"He [Aikman] was coherent. He could talk even though he was in shock. He didn't want anything for the pain. He could breathe O.K., even though he had a few loose teeth in the back of his mouth," the PJ said.

McGrath checked Aikman's leg wounds and put on a pressure bandage. He also tried to apply a pneumatic splint, but it wouldn't stay inflated. An AK-47 round had penetrated the medical kit and gone through the middle of the bundle of splints.

"When I checked his feet, I saw a little hole in his boot. It turned out he'd been shot right through the top of his foot. The bullet came out the bottom. He told me later it happened as we reached the bottom of the door. I thought that was ironic. Here he is, with all this other stuff wrong with him, and we're sitting right together. My legs are behind him and his legs are behind me but he gets shot in the foot and I don't get a scratch," McGrath said.

On the way home, the helicopter pilot, Capt. Dave Stovall, had to decide whether to put in at Udorn or fly back to Nakhon Phanom. If he picked Udorn, they wouldn't be able to fly back to NKP without bringing a whole maintenance crew over to Udorn.

"They needed the helicopters badly because of all the missions going on," McGrath said. The decision was up to McGrath to make on the basis of Aikman's condition.

He decided on NKP. Still, their troubles weren't over. They ran into rough weather just before they went in. "You can't do anything about the weather," McGrath said.

"That's when we really started getting apprehensive. Aikman started slipping into shock. We got in O.K. and as soon as we landed they took him to the hospital. I kept checking his pulse. He came to pretty quick."

For McGrath, it had been "one of those days that you hear about, but never think you'll be involved in," as he put it.

"I guess I was lucky."

By and large, Chuck McGrath makes his own luck. He had decided early in his Air Force career to become a PJ. Then during training, he met an attractive airman named Candy. They were married on May 1, and two weeks later Chuck left for Southeast Asia.

He was assigned to Udorn, and in mid-July, Candy was sent to Korat, also in Thailand. Chuck didn't get to see her right away. He had been shot down on a mission in northern Laos, and had rolled down the side of a mountain in the crashing chopper. But he made it.

Sergeant McGrath never dreamed he would receive the Air Force Cross for his rescue of Captain Aikman. Nor did he suspect that the Air Force Sergeants Association would choose him to receive the Pitsenbarger Heroism Award, the Association's highest. McGrath is the fourth recipient of the award, named for a pararescuer, A1C William H. Pitsenbarger, who sacrificed his life on a rescue mission.

Jonelle McGrath, born last summer, may know when she grows up that her daddy is a reluctant hero. But Chuck McGrath was doing the job he chose to do, saving lives, and he just did the best he could. "Your only goal is to get in and out in one piece—that's the only thing you really think about."

SSgt. Charles D. McGrath claims his successes are just "the luck of the Irish." But men who were with Charles McGrath in the war zone know that he is a special kind of man; one with skill, intelligence, dedication, and—O.K., maybe just a little bit of luck. ☺