

16Nov72 Bobbin 05 SAR

On 16 November, Bobbin 05, an F-105G Wild Weasel with Captain Kenneth D. Thaete as pilot and Major Norbert J. Mair as electronic warfare officer, was shot down by a surface-to-air missile over North Vietnam. During the ejection sequence and subsequent landing, Captain Thaete suffered facial burns and a wrenched leg. Major Mair severely bruised his right thigh, sprained the right side of his back, and injured his right arm. Shortly after reaching the ground, both crewmen camouflaged their extra survival equipment, went into hiding, and attempted to contact U.S. aircraft on their survival radios. Although Major Mair and Captain Thaete did not know it, SAR forces had already been alerted by other members of the Bobbin flight.

(S) Major Mair and Captain Thaete were unable to make radio contact with friendly forces until approximately 0500 on 17 November when they reached two F-4 Fast FACs. The RCC at Nakhon Phanom ordered the 354th TFW to launch A-7 Sandys which were on 15-minute ground alert. The weather in the rescue area was 1,000 foot overcast, and the two downed crewmembers were situated in terrain characterized by rugged mountains and deep valleys. The weather did not clear, and the survivors were told that a pick-up would be attempted the following day.

(S) Enemy defenses near the rescue area included three known SAM sites, and numerous AAA sites with 85 and 100 millimeter radar controlled guns. Considering the heavy enemy defenses, the JRCC decided to launch a first light SAR effort. A myriad of details were worked out including the composition of the SARTF, ordnance, and the responsibilities of 16 A-7 Sandy aircraft. The Search and Rescue coordinating officers from the 354 TFW and the Jack RCC staff worked through the night arranging support aircraft, planning ingress/egress routes, selecting orbit points, scheduling tanker support, and preparing briefings. Included in the SARTF, in addition to the Jolly Green / A-7 Sandy team and the HC-130 Kings, were F-4 MIG Combat Air Patrol (MIGCAP), F-4 Gunfighters, F-105 Wild Weasel SAM suppressors, EB-66 Electronic Intelligence aircraft, and KC-135 tankers.

(S) On 18 November, the general planning of briefings and the mission data packages were completed. Briefings were held and pertinent information distributed. Sandys 01 through 05 were launched at 0358 hours, Sandys 11-16 launched at 0434 hours, and Sandys 08 and 09 launched at 0608 hours.

(S) Contact was made with Bobbin 05B (Major Mair), but there was initially no contact with Bobbin 05A (Captain Thaete). However, on a pass over the survivors' area, Sandy 01 and Wolf 01, a Fast FAC, made contact with both crewmembers. Attempts were made to find routes for the helicopters to ingress/egress through the weather and mountains, but these attempts were unsuccessful. The first light effort was abandoned, and Sandy forces began recycling through the tankers.

(S) Tanker support was a serious problem because the tankers on station were becoming fuel limited. Several Sandys rendezvoused with tankers which already had

F-4s and F-105s waiting to refuel. At one time, 16 fighters were waiting to receive fuel from one tanker. The tankers responded by allocating fuel as equitably as possible, providing information about other tankers in the area, obtaining permission to go below Bingo fuel* or to land at other than home bases, and requesting that the appropriate agencies launch all available tankers.

(S) Sandy 01, the OSC, had found an ingress route from the coast to the survivors. Because of heavy AAA fire, the helicopters could not reach Major Mair and Captain Thaete along this route. Sandy 01 led Sandy 04 and 05 over the route to familiarize them with the area. Sandy 04 and 05 backtracked to the helicopters' orbit area and tried several times to get at least one helicopter through the clouds and into a valley for a pick-up run. These attempts failed. The helicopters, using radar altimeters, descended until they were 500 feet above ground level (AGL), but were still in the clouds and had to climb back up.

(S) The aircraft were getting low on fuel again. The Sandys and Jolly Greens refueled using the increased numbers of tankers that had become available. Sandy 01 had been airborne over six hours, flying in bad weather, over rugged mountain terrain, and through heavy enemy defenses. Major Clarke, a Sandy pilot, remarked: (S) I guess the adrenaline took a pump break about this time, because I realized how tired I was getting and how good a sandwich would have tasted right then. All I had was my water bottle which was almost empty. I knew that if the next effort failed again, we were through for the day.

(S) The Jolly Green and Sandy force refueled from King and KC-135s respectively. Sandys 01, 04, and 05 proceeded to the helicopter orbit point. Sandy 01 escorted Jolly 03 in an attempt to find an ingress route. Sandys 04 and 05 proceeded on top of the clouds to the Gulf of Tonkin, went under the clouds, and ingressed to the survivors' position. Sandys 04 and 05 received a barrage of AAA, and it took two attempts for them to reach the objective area. They then had to backtrack from the survivors towards the Jolly Green's orbit, hoping to intercept Sandy 01 and Jolly 03 and lead them to the survivors. Sandys 02 and 03 rendezvoused with Sandys 11-16 and proceeded to the coast to try to break under the weather. Sandy 01 and Jolly 03 proceeded eastward above the overcast. Sandy 01 remarked: (S) I asked him (Jolly 03) how low the ground was under him. He said he was in a valley, so I punched down into the stuff. . . . when I got under him and broke out underneath, I was in a valley, sure enough.

(S) Captain John M. Gillespie, the aircraft commander of Jolly 03 stated: (S) Circling the valley, with a 1,000 foot or less ceiling Major Clarke used his direction finding equipment to vector my aircraft into the valley. The two aircraft, an A7D and an HH-53, then began the long run inbound to the survivors. Originally the route was 27 miles long, but due to low ceiling and obscured mountain ridges, valleys the run in went up and down covering about 45 miles. During the run in, Major Clarke displayed great skill and courage maneuvering his high speed aircraft between narrow valleys made even narrower by the low clouds. It was difficult for me in a slow flying helicopter to

maneuver through the mountains and weather, for Major Clarke it was a fantastic example of bravery and skill.

(S) Maneuvering around villages and other possible enemy defenses, Sandy 01 and Jolly 03 reached the ridgeline where Major Mair and Captain Thaete were located. Sandy 01 flew over the survivors and received ground fire near Major Mair's location. Two smoke flights, Sandys 11-13 and 14-16 led by Sandys 02 and 03, made their run in from the coast. By this time, all aircraft were subjected to heavy AAA fire. The flights delivered their smoke perfectly and the smoke screens were effective in shielding the helicopter from the view of the AAA sites. Captain Thaete estimated that each aircraft that passed over him took 40-80 rounds of AAA fire and that the rate doubled during the smoke flight run. Shielded by smoke from the AAA fire, Jolly 03 began the pickup of Captain Thaete and Major Mair. Jolly 03 received small arms and automatic weapons fire and returned the fire using miniguns. The survivors were picked up successfully, but Sandy 01 was hit and had to be escorted to Da Nang. Jolly 03 returned to Nakhon Phanom without incident.

(S) The SAR mission, from the time the first Sandy took off until the last one landed, lasted nine hours. While this mission was being conducted, F-4 and F-105 aircraft were attacking SAM and other radar sites in the area. At least seven different kinds of aircraft were involved in the rescue.

Several problems were encountered during the Bobbin 05 mission. These were insufficient initial tanker support, lack of planning beyond a first light effort, poor radio discipline, occasional absence of an OSC in the rescue area, and improper use of the King aircraft. Many of these problems were a result of incomplete training of the A-7 crews

S) The Bobbin 05 rescue effort was the first use of the A-7 for a SAR mission. Two characteristics of the aircraft were significant: (1) the higher speed increased the survivability of this RESCORT aircraft, and (2) its navigation system was very¹ effective in locating survivors and leading the Jolly Greens to them.

Bobbin 05 F-105

I was low bird 2nd wave, 4 birds & 2 Kings went on this mission. the run in was made on the 4th try, this is the first mission that A-7's were used & they worked out well. It was a trap, two 50 cal. machine gun nests on the hill above the survivors, we got one. the A-7's got the other. They got hosed putting a smoke screen across a valley. As we got the 2nd manout I heard dogs & small arms, & returned fire. Got back to base a chip light went on for the 2nd time. Also we found no hits in the chopper.

November 18 1972

Maj. Norbert J. Thaete

Capt. Kennth D. Maier













