

30 November 1972

Officially we were called the 37th ARRS, but to any downed pilot who heard the heavy chop of the six bladed rotors from the HH-53C helicopter, it was the sound of the Jolly Green Giant's. After six years at DaNang and rescuing 887 downed fliers¹ or troops in contact, a flight of six HH-53's departed "Rocket City" for the last time. Only two weeks earlier the scramble klaxon had sounded, but instead of the expected loudspeaker cry of "*Scramble the Jolly's*" a voice unexpectedly announced that all squadron members should gather in the main hanger for an important announcement from our commander. Twenty minutes later almost 200 aircrew, maintenance, and support personnel milled around openly wondering what this was all about. No one in the squadron could ever recall the scramble klaxon being used for any purpose except launching our aircraft on a combat rescue. LtCol. Stephen L. Sutton soon walked out of Jolly Operations, smiling from ear to ear. He wasted no time, and in a loud voice proclaimed simply "We're all going home, it's over." The squadron erupted into spontaneous turmoil and cheers. We were all screaming, jumping up and down, patting each other on the back. It took some time to quiet this squadron down. After repeated orders to quiet down Col. Sutton was able to speak once again. His next announcement was going to surprise us almost as much as his first. "You will all be out of here in less than three weeks." Again chaos erupted. This meant that we would not be spending Christmas in Vietnam. It was almost too good to be true. Could we really shut down our entire rescue squadron, pack up our gear, and process each of us for reassignment in 21 days? The answer was an unequivocal yes. Throughout DaNang Air Base, this process was repeating itself at all of the American units. I suspect that it was repeating itself at all U.S. combat units throughout the country of Vietnam.

The powers to be in Washington had negotiated a peace treaty with the North Vietnamese. They now wanted us to pack up and get out of town as fast as we could, if not faster. We had essentially declared victory and were now going extricate ourselves from the quagmire Vietnam had become. The men of the 37th ARRS were more than glad to enthusiastically execute this order. To expedite our departure all unit facilities, equipment, weapons, and munitions were to be turned over to the VNAF. The only exception to this policy would be our aircraft and individually issued professional gear. The aircraft would be transferred to the 40th ARRS at NKP Thailand. Each individual's professional gear would be boxed, inspected by customs, and shipped to our next base of assignment. The same process would repeat itself with our personally owned possessions.

The next three weeks would consist of long days of furious activity. During the day we packed personal and professional gear for shipment back to the states. Performance reports and awards and decorations packages had to be completed on everyone. There was serious concern among U.S. commanders to ensure that we did not ship any weapons or munitions out of the country for war souvenirs. They also wanted to ensure that no one shipped any illegal drugs out in their gear. This led to extensive inspections of all boxes being shipped out of country. Col. Sutton knew that we PJ's probably had some weapons and explosives that were not listed on unit supply records. To provide a means to turn them in legally he instituted an amnesty policy. He placed a wooden box, about 4x4 feet size, in the PJ section with an amnesty sign on it.

PJ weapons in Vietnam had long been an issue that rescue unit commanders struggled with. We had entered the war with .38 caliber pistols and an M-16 rifle. These were the only official weapons authorized by the Air Force for use by its PJ's. As the war dragged on the character of the pararescue mission also changed. Dozens of pararescuemen attended Recondo school at Nha Trang and became trained in the full spectrum of infantry weapons and explosives. These pararescuemen in turn trained other PJ's who arrived in country but could not get to Recondo school. Pararescuemen routinely found themselves on the ground, in enemy territory for longer periods than the Air Force anticipated. The North Vietnamese also placed a bounty on PJ's, to motivate their troops to capture or kill pararescuemen who were attempting to rescue a downed pilot. This led to pararescue teams in country deciding which weapons were needed to survive in this hostile environment. The only problem with this arrangement was that the weapons carried by PJ's at the end of the war were not authorized in USAF supply tables of allowance. In the last few months of the war, Col. Sutton was under pressure from his superiors to ensure his PJ's carried only a pistol and a rifle. He in turn put pressure on TSgt Harwell Quillian, the PJ NCOIC to ensure that only authorized weapons were carried. When Sergeant Quillian told us to turn in our illegal weapons a couple of months earlier, the PJ's assigned were smart enough not to try and argue the illogic of unilateral

¹ *The Gunfighter Gazette* (DaNang), 2 December 1972

The weapons amnesty issue was the only minor sour note in the shut down of the 37th. But it only took one passing moment in the blur of other happy activity that was occurring. Everyone received PCS assignments and processed out through the DaNang personnel office. Most would be going straight back to the United States and would be assigned to CONUS air rescue units. About one third of the aircrews and PJ's would be reassigned to the 40th ARRS at NKP, Thailand. Virtually all those going to Thailand were volunteers. Another issue that needed to be resolved was what to do with "Stretch". Stretch was an 11-foot long Indian Rock python, that had been the PJ mascot for years. The snake cage was rather large and located outside but adjacent to the Pararescue Section. No one with any sense at all went into this cage without having one of the PJ snake handlers with them. No one ever realized that the cages extra large size was a result of it serving the dual purpose of a munitions storage area for all the "illegal high explosives" that the 37th PJ's owned. Thank God that a 122mm rocket never hit this cage, the secondary explosions would have been rather spectacular. It was decided that "Stretch" would PCS with the men going to NKP. It would be flown there on one of the Jolly's when they departed. Stretch's new cage at NKP would be located next to the 40th ARRS's mascot, "Buffy". Buffy was a black Malayan sun bear.

At sunset we ceased work and celebrated the end of the war. Raucous parties were occurring all over DaNang. Most of the 37th gravitated the PJ barracks bar or the Jolly Green Inn, the maintenance bar. The night before the "Jolly's" departed for NKP the squadron had its last official party. Appropriately it would be at the Jolly Green Inn. All realized that it would be their last social gathering before the squadron was deactivated. Everyone was glad to soon be leaving Vietnam. However it was a mixed emotion. We would also be saying goodbye to many of our brothers in arms, men who we had gone to battle with, laughed with, cried with. Most realized that it was likely that they would never meet again. As the free drinks flowed it was impossible to not recall the exploits they shared, the men they had saved, and the teammates they had lost in combat. These rescue missions had been some of the most hazardous type of flying activity in this unpopular war. The rescuemen were clear about their mission. "Rescue shot down American pilots from capture or death by the NVA", unpopular war be damned. We were not politicians, we were American warriors. Tonight the warriors celebrated one last time. Pilots, maintenance men, PJ's, clerks, supply men and other squadron members toasted each other. The drinks flowed freely, the music was loud, the mood was buoyant. Late in the night someone started singing a song we had all heard sung before. Soon everyone was singing. The song was "The ballad of the Jolly Green Giants." It had been written many years earlier by Bull Durham. It went like this:

Insert after obtaining permission to use.

All party's end. They next morning found us all on the flightline ramp. The crews were in the "Jolly's", rotors turning. Those of us remaining at DaNang, awaiting the arrival of the "Freedom Bird", waved to the departing crews, they waved back. The mood was serious, the men quiet. We were witnessing the end of an era. After takeoff, the "Jolly's" formed up in tight formation and then over flew Jolly Green Operations. It was a final salute to their teammates who gathered on the flightline to witness the last Jolly Green Giants over flying DaNang Air Base. There was more than one moist eyeball in the men left on the now very quiet flightline. In an interview with the DaNang newspaper, the Gunfighter Gazette, Col Sutton stated the following "I cannot begin to describe the dedication these guys have for their job. It is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, always alert and ready to pick someone up so 'Charlie' does not get him. When we bring a downed pilot back to DaNang the guys in my squadron act like he is a long lost brother. They really have empathy for the jet jocks and all men in trouble. They are the greatest bunch of guys I have ever known."²

In a few days the last rescuemen assigned to the Jolly Green Giants departed for home. But they would not be the last rescuemen leaving DaNang. That honor would belong to the Pedro's. The HH-43 LBR unit was redesignated Det. 7 40th ARRS and remained at DaNang until the peace treaty was signed on 30 January 73. The Pedro's were the first into the war. It was fitting that they would be the last rescuemen out of Vietnam.

² *The Gunfighter Gazette* (DaNang), 2 December 1972



THE GAZETTE

Vol. 1, No. 22

December 2, 1972

Jolly Green's leave Da Nang

After six years of its surge and rescuing 587 downed airmen, the Jolly Green Hawks left Da Nang Thursday, November 30.

To the officially minded, the unit was called the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (37th ARRS), but to any downed pilot who has ever heard the heavy chop of the six-bladed rotors from the HH-3 helicopter, it is the Jolly Green Hawks, the men who have the job of going into hostile terrain and plucking out our downed airmen.

In most of the rescues made by the Jolly's, the downed pilots were in North Vietnam, while in many other cases the rescues were in threatened areas in South Vietnam.

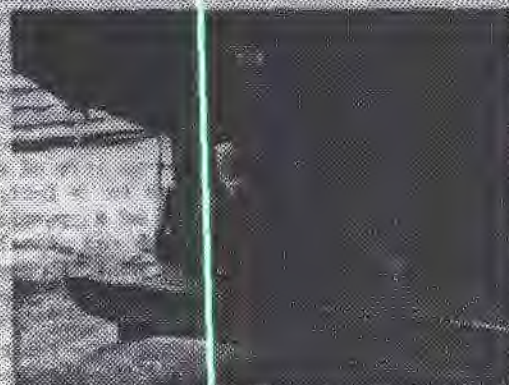
As the men of the Jolly's packed during the last few days, they recalled some of the exploits they had shared, the men they saved and the buddies they lost. "I'm glad to be leaving Da Nang," said 1st Lt. Frank Lund 25, 3rd Helicopter Sq., 1st. "But I hate leaving the 37th." The command stated the feelings of all the airmen who, under the command of Lt. Col. Stephen L. Sutton, 40 Montebello, Calif., experienced one of their most successful years.

In their rescue operations, the Jolly's were on alert 24 hours a day with five

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Two Jolly's gain altitude as they take off from Da Nang for the last time. (U.S. Air Force Photo by 1st Sgt. Gus Vines)



1st Sgt. Steve Jones, a paratrooper and Jolly Green with the Jolly's secures his mini-gun for the voyage from Da Nang. (U.S. Air Force Photo by 1st Sgt. Gus Vines)

Unit I.G. system begins

Personnel who feel they are the victims of an injustice or who need assistance with a problem will soon have a system working for them here at Da Nang that begins at unit level and extends to the Wing Inspector General.

The system is designed to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to seek a solution to a problem and gives supervisors at each echelon of organization the fullest opportunity to learn about the problem and solve it.

In a letter to all commanders this week, Col. Clifford Allison Jr., Wing Vice Commander and Wing Inspector General, pointed out that complaints and grievances may be presented to him at any time. "The individual's right to present complaints is assured and absolutely no intimidation or retaliatory action against him will be tolerated," he emphasized.

Each unit has been directed to designate Unit Complaint Officers who will be assisted by senior, active NCO's. These additional duty personnel have direct access to unit commanders and the Wing I.G. in resolving complaints. If an individual is not satisfied at the unit level, he may petition the Wing I.G. or

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Turkey Day

The China Beach Protestant Orphanage has been in operation since 1962 and is under the direction of Rev. and Mrs. Gordon H. Smith.



Chaplain (Capt.) Kenneth E. Nelson lends a helping hand and points out the correct way for a little girl from the China Beach Protestant Orphanage. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Sgt. Paul Kennedy)



Col. Jack H. Eginton, commander of the 620th Tactical Control Squadron, chats with Rev. and Mrs. Gordon H. Smith, directors of the China Beach Protestant Orphanage. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Sgt. Paul Kennedy)

Unit I.G. (continued from P.1)

higher, including the I.G., Headquarters USAF. Individuals always have the right to see the Wing I.G. on any matter but we believe that the new procedures will result in increased communication at the most vital level, the squadron or unit level.

"Our objective," he emphasized, "is to give everyone an opportunity to listen and solve the problems of individuals locally. We want everyone on Da Nang to have the confidence that he will get a sympathetic and objective hearing and that something will be done for him if it can be done at all. As the Wing Inspector General, I have an open door policy. I expect each commander to have the same policy through their unit complaint monitor and NCO assistants. Assisting me as my senior NCO advisor will be the Wing Sergeant Major, MSgt. W.D. McCombs."

Personnel having need of Inspector General assistance are urged to contact their unit complaint officer and NCO's and rely upon this new system so it will become a viable and workable part of the Wing program.

Jolly's (continued from P.1)

aircraft and 11 crewmembers. With the aid of a tanker aircraft the Jolly's could refuel and go anywhere they were needed. On Monday, May 1, of this year Jolly's played a major role in the evacuation of Quang Tri City just before the enemy captured the city. In that incident, they evacuated more than 100 South Vietnamese personnel.

Dr. (Capt.) Jerry Howell, 29, Enterprise, Ala., the flying flight surgeon with the Jolly's said, "My numerous combat missions with the Jolly's have been the most rewarding of my medical career."

An oddity with the Jolly's is a U.S. Coast Guard oficer. Speaking of his tour with the unit, Lt. Jack Stice, 33, Sarasota, Fla., said, "My tour here has been the best experience of my life. I've saved many people in the states, but rescuing a guy over here is saving him from becoming a POW and makes a guy feel really great."

Colonel Sutton speaking of his men said, "I can't begin to describe the dedication these guys have for their job. Its 24 hours a day, seven days a week, always alert and ready to pick someone up so 'Charlie' doesn't get him. When we bring a downed pilot back to Da Nang the guys in my squadron act like he is a long lost brother. They really have empathy for the jet jocks and all men in trouble. They are the greatest bunch of guys I have ever known."

The men of the Jolly's leave Da Nang with a proud pat because, as evidenced by their 887 saves, they have lived up to their motto, "So That Others May Live."

From: Rouhier, Chuck <Chuck.Rouhier@Deskbook.wpafb.af.mil>
To: 'Robert LaPointe' <rlapointe@gci.net>
Date: Thursday, April 01, 1999 4:13 AM
Subject: RE: The closure of the 37th

Good story Bob. Did you know that one of the Jolly's spent an extra three or four days at DaNang? Remember Cayetano Pina? He was the FE. Shortly after departing the base they got an MGB chip light and returned. They tried for a number of days to fix the problem. Only couldn't find anything wrong. Nothing in the screens or on the plugs. Pina finally said to hell with it and they flew it to NKP with the chip light glowing. Pina said they were getting a little nervous being there all by themselves. Guess the Viets were not too friendly.

Chuck

Jolly FE '71-'74

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From: Robert LaPointe [mailto:rlapointe@gci.net]
Sent: Wednesday, March 31, 1999 9:30 PM
To: Rouhier, Chuck
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Attached is a story about the closure of the 37th ARRS in December 72. I will be putting it up on my site later this week.

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