

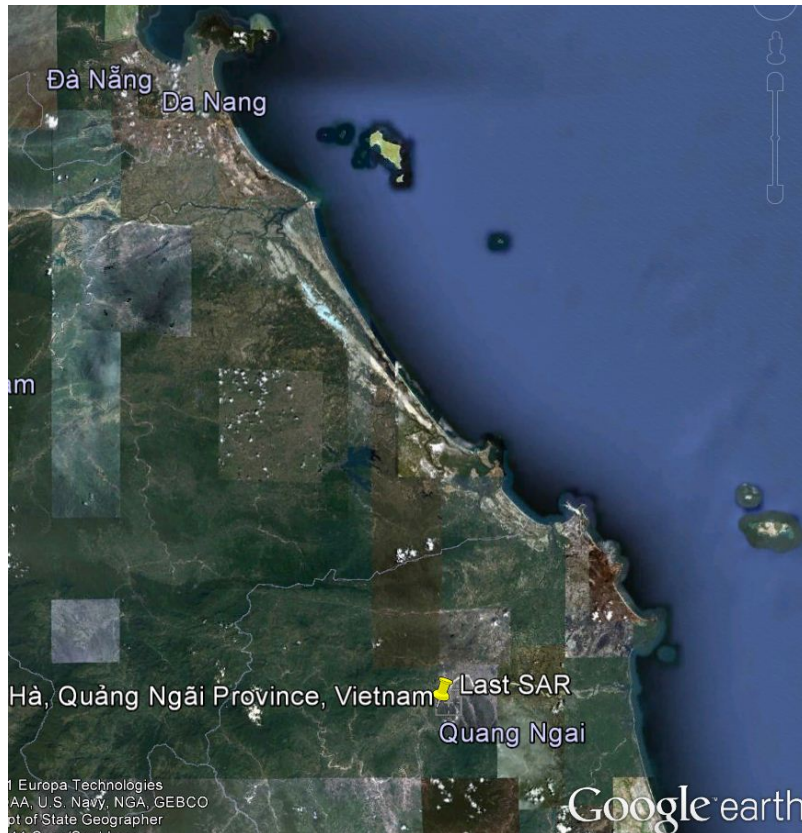
An Unexpected Surprise

November 7th 1972 began as hundreds of other days for the rescuemen at DaNang who flew the Jolly Green Giant helicopters and the Sandy's. Much of the early morning activity at the 37th ARRS was focused on a weather evacuation the units helicopters to Tan Son Nhut. Except for two HH-53's all of the units aircraft were preparing to depart DaNang to avoid an incoming typhoon. The two remaining Jolly's were alerted for a possible feet dry SAR about 70 miles south of DaNang.

There was no way for them to have known that they were about to make history. Even if they did know, it is unlikely that any of them could have guessed how the Jolly's and Sandy's would enter the history books, *this time*. At days end, they were celebrating seven combat saves from a U.S. Army UH-1 helicopter. They did not know it at that time, but the rescuemen were about to fly the last combat SAR by the HH-53's of the 37th ARRS and the last combat SAR ever flown by USAF A-1 Skyraiders.

An Army UH-1 Huey helicopter (call sign Coachman 159) with seven survivors went down during the late afternoon of November 6th. The downed helicopter was approximately 70 miles south-southeast of DaNang. The terrain consisted of low mountains and jungle. This area was a known enemy stronghold and was potentially extremely hostile. During the night the downed crew made weak radio contact with transient aircraft passing high overhead. Weather permitting, a first light SAR was being planned. Dawn broke with extremely poor weather at DaNang and in the area of the SAR. There was heavy rain, turbulence, low clouds, and poor visibility. In spite of the weather, the Sandy's headed to the area and the Jolly's soon followed.¹

The estimated position of the UH-1 was approximately 15 miles west of Quang Ngai, South Vietnam. As usual, time was of the essence. In addition to racing the enemy to the survivors, the rescuemen were also racing the arrival of the typhoon. At 0742L Jolly's 71 and 72 were airborne and ordered to hold feet wet just offshore Quang Ngai. Sandy's 7 & 8 entered the SAR area to pinpoint the missing men. The A-1 crews were forced to fly at dangerously low altitudes (200 ft or less) in order to locate the survivors. Once their exact location had been determined, Sandy 7 became the on scene commander and remained overhead the survivors. Sandy 8 went out to pick up and escort the Jolly's in for the pickup. Sandy 8 informed the Jolly crews that there was a large clearing near the survivors and they would probably be able to land for the rescue. Enemy forces in the area had been shooting at the survivors but so far had not fired at the Sandy's. The two HH-53's flew in formation at tree top level during the ingress to the survivors. Both helicopters landed close to the survivors and the seven men from the Huey all ran to and climbed into Jolly Green 71.



Jolly Green 71 was credited with seven combat saves. It was crewed by:
 Pilot Captain James Bruner, copilot Captain Houk
 FE SSgt Jimmie D. Victor
 PJ SSgt Douglas Wilson
 PJ Sgt John Richardson
 Also on board was a combat photographer with the last name of Summerfield.

The rescued personnel included:

- CWO2 Mickey Wilson, 62 Aviation Co. 11th Combat Aviation Gp.
- CWO2 Bert Schrivestein, 62 Aviation Co. 11th Combat Aviation Gp.
- Sp5 William Stephenson
- Sp5 Tobby Agurrie
- Lt. JG Edward Culhune USN, 1ST Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Co. (ANGLICO)
- 1st Lt (USMC) Francis Meyers
- Capt McCabe, 1st Ranger Group

According the 37th ARRS logbook that recorded survivors rescued, these survivors became saves number 878 through 884. They were the last combat saves by the Jolly's based at DaNang.

				SURVIVOR NAME, RANK, SSAN & UNIT		
DATE	CREW	SAVE	JG	..	LOCATION	TYPE SAVE
7 NOV	BRUNER	878	71			7 COMBAT
<u>7</u>	HOUK	↓		CWO2 Michael Wilson SSNs removed		
	VICTOR	8884		G2 AVN CO 11 CAG		
	WILSON			CWO2 Bert Schriebsheim		
	RICHARDSON			G2 AVN CO 11 CAG		
	SUMNERFIELD			Sys William Stephenson		
				Sys TODDY AGURRIE		
				LT(JG) Culhane Edward		
				USNA		
				1st Angli. Co		
				1st (USMC)		
				MEYERS, Francis		
				CPT MECHOE		
				1st Ranger Group		

Excerpt from 37th ARRS DaNang AB RVN "Save Logbook"

The time frame of the rescue was as follows:

- 0742 JG 71 & 72 airborne from DaNang
- 0818 Jolly's holding feet wet
- 0854 JG 71 & 72 land Quang Ngai for fuel
- 0930 Sandy 7 has visual on survivors. Weather marginal for SAR operations.
- 0935 King wants Jolly's 71 & 72 up and to holding point
- 0936 Sandy 7 in contact with Coachman. 7 survivors. No ground fire.
- 0942 Sandy 8 leading JG 71 & 72 up river
- 0955 Sandy's advise Jolly's may be able to land
- 1003 Jolly's land near survivors position
- 1006 All survivors (7) on board JG 71
- 1045 Jolly Green 71 & 72 land at DaNang
- 1430 Jolly Green 71 & 72 airborne for TSN²

THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS
TO
JOHN T. RICHARDSON

Sergeant John T. Richardson distinguished himself by heroism while participating in aerial flight as a Pararescue Specialist of an HH-53C Rescue Helicopter near Quang Ngai, Republic of Vietnam, on 7 November 1972. On that date, Sergeant Richardson's outstanding airmanship and sound technical skill displayed under extremely hazardous conditions, resulted in the successful rescue of seven American aircrew members from certain death or capture by hostile armed forces. With full knowledge that other rescue attempts had been deterred by hostile ground fire in the area, Sergeant Richardson manned his gun position to defend the helicopter as it was flown through marginal weather conditions to the survivor's location and was landed in a clearing from which all seven survivors were recovered. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Richardson reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

More detailed information concerning this historical SAR was provided by one of the survivors, Bert Schreiberstein, who wrote after the war to the man who flew one of the A-1's that coordinated his rescue. The A-1 callsign was Sandy 8 and it was flown by Don Screws. Bert wrote:

"November 6, 1972 started out uneventfully. Our four member UH-1 crew (first pilot, aircraft commander, door gunner and crew chief) woke up after remaining overnight at Chu Lai. We picked up three passengers at the 1st ARVN Division HQ in Quang Ngai; a Navy LT (jg), a Marine 1LT (ANGLICO) and an US Army Ranger Advisor. Then proceeding to our area of assignment for a naval gunfire mission in a valley running north-south 5 kilometers inland from Quang Ngai.

Our helicopter mission was simple: Use naval guns from an off-shore naval Destroyer to destroy huts and suspected enemy positions that had sprung up in the valley southwest of Quang Ngai. As we were flying up and down the valley looking for targets, a typhoon, unknown to us, was brewing off the coast and fast approaching our area. With limited numbers of U.S. troops in Vietnam at the end of 1972, there were no air weather warning stations in our area either.

We spent the morning and afternoon orbiting the valley directing 5" naval gunfire at suspected enemy facilities and troop concentrations. When the typhoon arrived, we were blocked by the bad weather and not able to return to Quang Ngai. Trying to circle the bad weather was not possible and the Navy ship off-shore could not pick us up on radar.

When we finally called it a day, we turned to fly north in the valley only to see that the clouds from the typhoon had blocked our exit. We then climbed in altitude in order to fly over the clouds back to Quang Ngai and then to Chu Lai. Unfortunately, the clouds were over 30,000 feet high. We were already thinking about flying to the Destroyer and ditching the helicopter if necessary in the ocean. We had only 30-40 minutes of fuel left, so we called the Destroyer and asked if they could pick us up on their radar. They couldn't. The weather got nastier. Now we really were in a bind. Flying now at 8,000 feet and in midst of clouds, we couldn't lose altitude without fear of striking a mountain or hilltop.

We decided to descend in a slow spiral, hoping to see the hills in enough time to soften the crash. We descended for over what felt like an hour, but was probably only fifteen minutes. The door gunner got on the intercom and said that he saw a hole in the clouds and a clearing below. As darkness approached, we landed the aircraft on a river sand-bar.

We figured that the best thing to do was shut down the helicopter and get away from it, just in case our landing was heard by enemy troops in the area. We removed the two machine guns and we proceeded in the dark away from the river about 100 meters. It was there that we discovered that we had left behind one of the machine guns. We didn't go back. I was carrying an M-79 grenade launcher and had about 40 rounds, with

the exception of the one machine-gun the other people had M-16s. We laid down on the ground in a circle with our feet touching and weapons pointing outward. Both Mickey and I had aircraft survival radios. We tried repeatedly to contact someone on the emergency frequency but apparently without success. It started to rain.

It was around 9 o'clock in the evening when we first heard what sounded like a motor boat. Then the sound stopped as it approached our vicinity. We heard some people speaking Vietnamese, then without warning, they sprayed the area with AK-47 fire. This firing continued for a few minutes. The NVA were conducting reconnaissance by fire. This meant they didn't know where we were, but were hoping that if they fired in our direction we would return the fire and give away our position and strength. We did not return the fire. The firing stopped but the rain didn't. It was after the encounter with the NVA, that an Army fixed wing flying from Saigon to DaNang heard our distress signal on his Guard frequency. He was able to hear our beeper signal but not our voice transmissions. Our radio batteries were getting weak. He asked us a series of questions and we replied with one beep for yes, and two for no. He got the message that we had come under fire and that no one was injured, as yet. He said that he'd get some help. I wondered how, since he had no idea where we were.

During the night we heard the drone of a C-130 trying to find our position on the ground. In the early morning before daybreak, we thought we heard helicopters and the sound of .51 caliber machine-gun fire. A friend later told me that the Air Force planes had pinpointed our position within a 10-kilometer square area and some of our 11 CAG unit helicopters and gunships were trying to scout the area. Only to come under heavy .51 caliber machine-gun fire as they got closer to our position.

It wasn't until later the November 7, long before dawn, that we were able to make contact with you, Call Sign: SANDY 08.

I remember how you were able to locate our position by having us send one beep when you were left of our position and two beeps if you were to the right. You cannot imagine how happy we were when you finally dipped below the clouds and we could see your A-1 Skyraider. You were then able to direct two Jolly Green Giant USAF helicopters from the 37th ARRS to land in an open area for a successful pick-up.

We ran to the aircraft through the gale force wind of the rotor wash. We hastily got on board the helicopters and were flown down the river at speeds that threw us off balance with the centrifugal force of each turn. We landed at the abandoned airfield at Quang Ngai. It seemed that every one was there when we got off the helicopters. The medics gave us a once over. No one was injured.

I assure you, your calmness, professionalism and dogged determination that day to locate and secure our rescue, worked wonders to relieve the fears of 7 very wet and very scared survivors.

You have no idea how satisfying it is for me, after 29 years, to finally thank you for saving my life. Because of your actions that day (which to you may have been just another rescue mission), I survived to marry my sweetheart (married now nearly 28 years), have a daughter that is now 21 years old and continue to serve in the Army until 1992.

Don, there are significant images that have stayed with me through out the years; the green nylon parachute opening on my first airborne jump, my wife's eyes when I said "I do", the first time I saw my daughter after her birth, and the A-1 Skyraider that saved my life.

Thank you Don Screws.

*Bert Schreiberstein, LTC US Army Retired"
62nd Cbt Avn Company (Royal Coachmen) November 1972³*

CWO2 Mickey Wilson continued to fly combat operations in UH-1's after this incident. On 8 January 1973 his helicopter was shot down just north of the Qua Viet river, near Quang Tri. He was listed as missing in action for years, but later changed to "missing presumed dead". His name is etched on the Vietnam War Memorial, panel 01W – Line 110.

Normally, following a SAR the Jolly pilot would write a mission report. Most of the stories written in this book have used these post mission reports as the primary source documents for information concerning that mission. However, a search of the Air Force Historical Research Center could find no mission report for the November 7th mission that was the last CSAR for the 37th. The most likely reason for the missing report was the fact that soon after this SAR the men of the 37th were notified that their unit was being deactivated and all of them would be leaving DaNang before months end. Preparing to depart DaNang likely took precedence over writing the SAR report.

Just prior to this SAR, all A-1's remaining in Southeast Asia were transferred to the South Vietnamese Air Force at Bien Hoa AB. However, on 9 November 1972, 7th AF decided that six A-1's were needed for Sandy Alert at DaNang. Six A-1 pilots were flown to Bien Hoa where they signed hand receipts for the loan of the Skyraiders. By the 11th the A-1's were at DaNang on Alert. On the 15th they were returned to the VNAF and the Air Forces A-1 inventory was zero.⁴

¹ Source = History of the 56th Special Operations Wing, Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, Volume 1, 1 July – 31 December 1972 located at AFHRA

² JRCC Search and Rescue Log, 6 & 7 November 1972, original logbooks located at Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), Joint Base Pearl Harbor – Hickam, HI

³ Bert Schreiberstein, email message to author, December 19, 2001

⁴ 56 SOW History, July – December 1972, Vol 3A. Source documents located at the Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, AL