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Jolly Green 43 (Capt. Purser)

Subject: Recommendation For Decoration For Heroism

The following information is provided for your consideration and action for the award of the appropriate decorations.

a. During joint operations resulting in the recovery of the SS Mayaguez and the return of her crew, the crew of HH-53C Jolly Green 43, consisting of Capt. Roland W. Purser, ^{APC} [REDACTED], Aircraft Commander; 1Lt. Robert P. ^{SS} Gradle, ^{SS} [REDACTED], Co-Pilot; TSgt Billy D. Willingham, Flight Mechanic, ^{SS} [REDACTED]; TSgt Peter S. Harding, ^{SS} [REDACTED] Pararescue Technician; ^{SS} Sgt Thomas J. Bateson, ^{SS} [REDACTED] Pararescue Specialist; A1C Dennis W. McKiver, ^{SS} [REDACTED], Pararescue Specialist, displayed extraordinary heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force on and near Koh Tang Island, Gulf of Thailand, on 15 May 1975.

~~b. On that date~~ Capt. Purser and his crew were tasked with the insertion of 29 United States Marines on Koh Tang Island as number two in a flight of two. ^{He and his crew} (Jolly Green 43) arrived off the island to learn that three of the four CH-53s tasked with initial insertion of the GSF (Ground Security Force) had been shot down, one exploding on the eastern LZ (Landing Zone) and another two going down in the waters close offshore. A third CH-53 was badly shot up prior to insertion and pulled off for the Thai coast. Directed by his flight leader, Jolly Green 42 that they would attempt simultaneous insertions on the two western LZs, Capt. Purser began his run in at about 0615. Jolly Green 43 was forced to abort the approach by accurate and intense small arms and AW (Automatic Weapons) fire, sustaining repeated hits in the attempt. Informed by his crew that Jolly Green 42's second attempt at insertion was successful and aware that 42 had suffered heavy battle damage in the process, Capt. Purser diverted to the second western LZ, successfully discharging his Marines. Sgts Harding and Bateson and ^{APC} ~~A1C~~ McKiver suppressed ground fire throughout the

two approaches despite the fact that the left hand minigun had jammed, forcing Airman McKiver to reply with his AR-15. Following insertion, Jolly Green 43 escorted Jolly Green 42 back to U-Tapao where 42 was grounded for battle damage. Capt. Purser's crew re-fueled and loaded with Marines for a second insertion, ~~Sgt. Harrison repairing the jammed minigun with parts cannibalized from 42.~~ Departing U-Tapao in company with Knife 52 at 0930, Capt. Purser assumed flight lead, arriving off Koh Tang at 1130. ^{advised} [Aware that Knife 52 unable to refuel in flight had a critical fuel problem, Capt. Purser elected to stand off while Knife 52 attempted insertion, coordinating his flight's activities through Cricket (ABCCC) with Lt. Gradle's assistance. By 1150 Knife 52 had been forced to discontinue efforts to insert his Marines by accurate and intense groundfire around the western LZs, departing with battle damage and bingo fuel at 1205. Arranging an escort for Knife 52, ^{Capt. Purser,} ~~Jolly Green 43's crew~~ ^{Jolly Green 43's crew} unhesitatingly committed, successfully inserting ^{ed} on ^{the} their designated LZ on the first attempt in spite of intense small arms and AW fire and incoming mortar rounds ~~in the LZ.~~ Capt. Purser's crew shot their way ^{of the LZ} in and shot their way out, with almost continuous suppressive fire from all three miniguns directed at muzzle flashes within 50 yards of the helicopter. Jolly Green 43 sustained numerous hits. This was one of the last three GSF insertions of the operation, providing the Marine force around the western LZs with badly needed manpower at a critical time. Remaining on scene despite unknown battle damage ^{damage} [from weapons up to and including 12.7MM/50 Cal], Capt. Purser's crew unhesitatingly committed to the extraction of the small and isolated group of Marines in the sole remaining eastern LZ. accompanied by crew of Knife 23. Preceded by an A-7 flight dropping riot control gas, ^{Capt. Purser} Jolly Green 43 initiated a low altitude run-in at 1420. ^{advised} [Covered by Jolly Green 11 who accompanied him in at low altitude.] Successfully locating the eastern LZ in a coordinated crew effort despite an extremely confused tactical situation and the confining effects of their gas masks Jolly Green 43's crew found that the gas drop had fallen.

badly short, missing the LZ area entirely and affording them no protection. By now the #1 minigun had jammed again, this time for good, forcing Sgt Harding to rely on his AR-15 for protection of the left side of the aircraft. With full knowledge of the desperate situation in the LZ, Capt. Purser's crew unhesitatingly elected to continue the approach despite the lack of gas cover. As the aircraft entered a hover, intense ground fire was received. Hits were sustained from small arms, AW, and mortar fragments. A 12.7MM round penetrated the #1 engine fuel feed line causing a massive leak. Sgt Bateson on the ramp minigun was knocked down by a mortar fragment which struck him in the left shoulder.

7M Number two minigun jammed during the approach leaving only the ramp minigun in operation. With the main fuel feed line punctured, #1 engine unwound, going immediately to zero torque as raw fuel under pressure began venting into the cabin. Informed of the situation in the cabin by Sgt Harding and ^{AMIN} ~~REC~~ McKiver and aware that Sgt Willingham and Lt Gradle were coolly and professionally dealing with the failed engine, Capt. Purser, in a calm display of flying skill, nursed his aircraft out of the LZ, extracting maximum performance from the remaining engine. Having shut down #1 engine and stopped the fuel leak under Sgt Willingham's guidance, Jolly Green 43 pulled back under escort from Jolly Green 11. Aware of the critical tactical situation ashore, Capt. Purser elected to divert to the USS Coral Sea, making a single engine landing at 1545, touching down with only 500 lbs. of useable fuel remaining. With Sgt Willingham's assistance, US Navy personnel effected field repairs to the ruptured fuel line with rubber hosing and tape. Aware of the increasingly critical situation on the island, Capt. Purser's crew elected to ^{RETURN TO} the scene as soon as repairs to the fuel line were completed despite the still unknown extent of additional battle damage to their aircraft. ~~Leaving a formation of two US Navy SH-3As~~ Jolly Green 43 departed Coral Sea at 1700, arriving of Koh Tang island at about 1730 to be committed in the final effort to withdraw the remaining Marines from the

western perimeter in the rapidly fading twilight. Facing groundfire which was still accurate and at times as intense as earlier in the day, Jolly Green 43 extracted 54 Marines on the first attempt, sustaining numerous hits in the process including a 7.62MM round in a main rotor spar. While on the ground Sg Harding and Bateson and ^{now} ~~ALC~~ McKiver responded to the constant and intense ground fire, using the one remaining minigun and their AR-15s to maximum effect. As GSF personnel were unloading, Lt. Gradle, monitoring all radio channels in addition to intercom, realized that Jolly Green 44 had been committed to the same LZ. His action in briefly illuminating Jolly Green 43's position with his searchlight -- by this time it was totally dark -- prevented a crash on the LZ. After depositing the 54 Marines, very close to the ultimate lifting capacity of the aircraft, on the Coral Sea, Jolly Green 43 once more refueled and returned to the scene to find that the last of the GSF had been extracted just prior to the arrival. In the course of the operation, the crew of Jolly Green 43 logged 16 hours of flying time and four sorties, making two opposed assault landings and an opposed extraction in addition to the attempted extraction on which an engine was shot out. Battle damage was sustained on every sortie except the last.

c. Through extraordinary heroism, incredible tenacity, magnificent airmanship and almost unbelievable aggressiveness in the face of the enemy despite repeated and severe damage to their aircraft, the crew of Jolly Green 43 reflected the highest credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force.