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FROM: 56SOW NAKHON PHANOM AFBD THAI/CC

TO: CINCPACAF HICKAM AFB HI/DP

INFO: 13AF CLARK AB PI/DP

USSAE//AF NAKHON PHANOM AFPT TH/DP

MAC SCOTT AFB ILL/DP

13AF ADVON UDORN AFBD TH/CC

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJ: RECOMMENDATION FOR DECORATION FOR HEROISM. (U). THIS IS
56SOW NSL 1 OF 18.

1. THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PROVIDED FOR YOUR INFORMATION AND
ACTION FOR AWARD OF APPROPRIATE DECORATIONS FOR ACTION DURING THE
JOINT OPERATION TO RESCUE THE CREW AND INSURE THE RETURN OF THE
USS MAYAGUEZ. THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS, MEMBERS OF MH-53 HELI-
COPTER CREW (JOLLY GREEN 43), 40 ARRS (MAC), NAKHON PHANOM AFPT,
THAILAND, DISPLAYED EXTRAORDINARY HEROISM IN MILITARY OPERATIONS
AGAINST AN OPPOSING ARMED FORCE NEAR KOH TANG ISLAND IN THE GULF
OF THAILAND ON 15 MAY 1975.

A. NAME, GRADE, SSAN & DUTY ASGN

PURSER, ROLAND W., CAPT, [REDACTED], ACFT CMR

Classified by 56SOW/CC
SUBJECT TO GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION
SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
AUTOMATICALLY DOWNGRADED AT TWO
YEAR INTERVALS
DECLASSIFIED ON DECEMBER 31, 1981

CV FIX

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EDWARD E. PARKER, Capt, USAF Chief, CRPO/DPH/2513		
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ARTHUR H. LEWIS, Lt Col, USAF, DP, 2511		
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K318.2 HIST. ARS VOL 74 - 31 DEC 75 VOL 5

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~~XXXXXX~~~~XXXX~~NAME, GRADE, SSAN & DUTY ASGN

GRADLE, ROBERT P., LLT, [REDACTED] CO-PILOT.

WILLINGHAM, BILLY D., TSGT, [REDACTED] FLT MECH.

HARDING, PETER S., TSGT, [REDACTED], PARARESCUE TECH.

BATESON, THOMAS JL, SGT, [REDACTED], PARARESCUE TECH.

MCKIVER, DENNIS W., ALC, [REDACTED], PARARESCUE TECH.

B. NARRATIVE: ON 15 MAY 75 CAPT PURSER AND HIS CREW WERE TASKED WITH THE INSERTION OF 29 U S MARINES ON KOK TANG ISLAND AS NUMBER TWO IN A FLIGHT OF TWO. JOLLY GREEN 43 ARRIVED NEAR THE ISLAND TO LEARN THAT THREE OF THE FOUR CH-53S TASKED WITH THE INITIAL INSERTION OF THE CSF (GROUND SECURITY FORCE) HAD BEEN SHOT DOWN BY INTENSE AND ACCURATE SMALL ARMS AND AUTOMATIC WEAPONS (AM) FIRE COMING FROM WELL CONCEALED AND HEAVILY ENTRENCHED ENEMY FORCES. ONE HELICOPTER HAD EXPLODED ON THE EASTERN LANDING ZONE (LZ); ANOTHER TWO HAD MANAGED TO GET CLEAR OF THE BEACHES AND OUT TO SEA BEFORE DITCHING. THE FOURTH CH-53 WAS SO BADLY

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DAMAGED BY THE INTENSE GROUND FIRE THAT, PRIOR TO ACCOMPLISHING
IT'S INSERTION, IT WAS FORCED TO ABORT AND WAS ATTEMPTING TO RETURN
TO THE THAI COAST. JOLLY GREEN 43 WAS DIRECTED BY HIS FLIGHT LEADER,
JOLLY GREEN 42, THAT THEY WOULD ATTEMPT SIMULTANEOUS INSERTIONS ON
THE TWO WESTERN LZS. THIS COURAGEOUS DECISION WAS MADE WITHOUT
HESITATION DESPITE THE PROVEN EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HEAVY ENEMY
FIRE WHICH HAD SHOT DOWN EVERY HELICOPTER WHICH HAD ATTEMPTED
INSERTION UP TO THIS POINT. JOLLY GREEN 43 WAS FORCED TO ABORT
THE APPROACH DUE TO THE HIGHLY ACCURATE AND VERY INTENSE SMALL ARMS
AND AN FIRE. CAPT PURSER'S CREW ELECTED TO DIVERT TO THE SECOND
WESTERN LZ. SGTs WILLINGHAM, HARDING, AND BATESON, CONTINUALLY
SUBJECTED TO THE EXTREMELY INTENSIVE GROUND FIRE WHICH HAD ALREADY
CRIPPLED THE FLIGHT LEAD, DIRECTED HIM INTO THE VERY SMALL LZ
HAVING ONLY MINIMUM ROTOR CLEARANCE ON A JAGGED TREE LINE ALMOST
AT THE WATERS EDGE. SGTs HARDING AND BATESON AND ANN MCKIVER, BY
A SKILLFUL, COORDINATED, AND DETERMINED EFFORT, MANAGED TO SURPRESS

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FROM:

TO:

GROUND FIRE, DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE LEFT MINIGUN HAD JAMMED. ANN McKIVER MOVED TO A SIGNIFICANTLY MORE EXPOSED POSITION AS HE LEANED AROUND HIS MINIGUN TO PROVIDE NECESSARY COVER WITH HIS AR-15. ALTHOUGH DAMAGE TO THE AIRCRAFT WAS SUSTAINED, THEIR SUPPRESSIVE FIRE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ENABLING JOLLY GREEN 43 TO SUCCESSFULLY DISCHARGE ITS MARINES. FOLLOWING THIS SUCCESSFUL INSERTION, JOLLY GREEN 43 PROVIDED ^{SEARCH AND RESCUE} ~~SEA AIR RESCUE~~ (SAR) ESCORT FOR JOLLY GREEN 42 RETURNING TO U-TAPAO, WHERE JOLLY GREEN 42 WAS SUBSEQUENTLY GROUNDED FOR BATTLE DAMAGE. CAPT PURSER'S CREW NOT REFUELED AT U-TAPAO AND LOADED A SECOND CONTINGENT OF MARINES FOR INSERTION. SGT BATESON, DISPLAYING SUPERIOR MECHANICAL SKILL AND INITIATIVE, QUICKLY REPAIRED THE JAMMED MINIGUN WITH PARTS CANNIBALIZED FROM JOLLY GREEN 42. CAPT PURSER WAS LEAD FOR THE RETURN FLIGHT WITH KNIFE 52, WHO, UNEQUIPPED FOR INFIGHT REFUELING, ARRIVED AT THE ISLAND WITH LIMITED LOITER TIME. CAPT PURSER, EVALUATING HIS WINGMAN'S FUEL STATUS, ELECTED

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TO STAND OFF AND PROVIDE SAR COVERAGE WHILE KNIFE 52 ATTEMPTED
 INSERTION. LT GRADLE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN EFFECTIVELY COORDINATING
 HIS FLIGHT'S ACTIVITIES THROUGH CRICKETT (ABCCC) DESPITE A CONFUSED
 AND RAPIDLY CHANGING TACTICAL SITUATION AND HEAVY CONGESTION ON ALL
 RADIO CHANNELS. THE ACCURACY AND INTENSITY OF THE GROUND FIRE
 FORCED KNIFE 52 TO DISCONTINUE HIS INSERTION EFFORTS WITH BATTLE
 DAMAGE. ARRANGING AN ESCORT FOR KNIFE 52S RETURN FLIGHT, JOLLY
 GREEN 433 CREW UNHESITATINGLY COMMITTED TO THE LZ WITHOUT REGARD
 FOR THEIR OWN SAFETY, AND IN SPITE OF INTENSIVE SMALL ARMS AND
 MORTAR FIRE, SUCCESSFULLY INSERTED BADLY NEEDED MARINE FORCES ON
 THE FIRST ATTEMPT. ON THIS, AS WELL AS THE FIRST APPROACH, CAPT
 PURSER HAD TO MAKE A 180 DEGREE TURN ON SHORT FINAL APPROACH FOR A
 TAIL FIRST ENTRY. THIS MANEUVER REQUIRED THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF
 INDIVIDUAL EFFORT FROM EACH CREWMEMBER AND PRECISION CREW COORD-
 INATION WHILE EACH CREWMEMBER WAS EXPOSED TO INTENSE GROUND FIRE.
 AT TIMES, ROTOR CLEARANCES OF AS LITTLE AS 2 TO 3 FEET FROM

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FROM:

TO:

ROCKS AND TREES ALONG THE SHORE LINE HAD TO BE MAINTAINED. CAPT PURSER'S ONLY MEANS OF KEEPING HIS AIRCRAFT CLEAR OF THESE OBSTACLES DURING THESE DEMANDING MANEUVERS WAS BY INSTANT RESPONSE TO VERBAL INPUTS FROM ALL CREWMEMBERS. THIS REQUIRED THE UTMOST IN INTERCOM DISCIPLINE. CAPT PURSER'S CREW SHOT THEIR WAY INTO AND OUT OF THE LZ WITH AN ALMOST CONTINUOUS DISCHARGE OF SUPPRESSIVE FIRE BY ALL THREE GUNNERS. JOLLY GREEN 43 SUSTAINED CONSIDERABLE BATTLE DAMAGE DURING THE TIME ON THE BEACH. THIS SUCCESSFUL INSERTION IN THE FACE OF DEVASTATING GROUND FIRE WAS ONE OF THE LAST THREE GSF INSERTIONS OF THE DAY'S OPERATION, PROVIDING THE MARINE FORCE AROUND THE WESTERN LZS WITH BADLY NEEDED MANPOWER AT A CRITICAL TIME. CAPT PURSER REALIZED THAT AIRBORNE SAR AND MARINE EXTRACTION HELICOPTERS WOULD SOON BE CRITICALLY NEEDED, AND CHOSE TO REMAIN ON SCENE, DESPITE UNKNOWN BATTLE DAMAGE FROM WEAPONS UP TO AND INCLUDING 12.7MM/51 CAL. A HURRIED INSPECTION OF THE AIRCRAFT AT THIS POINT, BY ALL CREWMEMBERS

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SUPPORTED CAPT PURSER'S DECISION. AT THIS POINT, THE CREW OF JOLLY GREEN 43 LEARNED THAT THE DECISION HAD BEEN MADE TO EXTRACT THE GSF. CAPT PURSER'S CREW, ACCOMPANIED BY WIFE 23, AND AGAIN UTTERLY DISREGARDING THEIR OWN SAFETY, UNHESITATINGLY COMMITTED TO THE EXTRACTION OF THE SMALL AND ISOLATED GROUP OF MARINES IN THE SOLE REMAINING EASTERN LZ. PROCEEDED BY A FLIGHT OF A-7S DROPPING RIOT CONTROL GAS, JOLLY GREEN 43 INITIATED A LOW ALTITUDE HIGH SPEED RUN-IN, BEING AFFORDED ADDITIONAL COVER BY JOLLY GREEN 11, WHO ACCOMPANIED HIM IN AT A LOW ALTITUDE TO PROVIDE BADLY NEEDED SUPPRESSIVE FIRE WITH HIS MINIGUNS. DESPITE AN EXTREMELY CONFUSED TACTICAL SITUATION, THE SERIOUS RESTRICTIONS TO MOVEMENT AND VISIBILITY CAUSED BY THEIR GAS MASKS, AND SEVERELY LIMITED MANEUVERING SPACE, JOLLY GREEN 43S CREW SUCCESSFULLY APPROACHED THE EASTERN LZ, AN EFFORT THAT AGAIN DEMANDED PRECISE CREW COORDINATION. HERE THEY FOUND THAT THE GAS DROP HAD FALLEN FAR SHORT, MISSING THE LZ AREA ENTIRELY, AFFORDING THEM NO

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FROM:

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PROTECTION FROM ENEMY FIRE. AGAIN, THE LEFT MINIGUN JARRIED, FORCING SGT HARDING TO RELY ON HIS AR-15 FOR SUPPRESSION OF GROUND FIRE AND PROTECTION OF THE LEFT SIDE OF THE HELICOPTER, AND REQUIRING HIM TO LEAN CLEAR OF THE SMALL GUN POSITION ARMOR PLATE TO EFFECTIVELY RETURN FIRE. AS THE AIRCRAFT PASSED THROUGH THE CRITICAL TRANSITION FROM A HIGH SPEED RUN-IN TO A STABLE HOVER, GROUND FIRE INTENSIFIED AND INCOMING MORTAR FIRE WAS OBSERVED ON THE LZ. HITS WERE SUSTAINED FROM SMALL ARMS, AM, AND MORTAR FRAGMENTS. A 12.7MM ROUND PENETRATED THE FUEL LINE TO THE NUMBER ONE ENGINE, CAUSING A MASSIVE FUEL LEAK AND AN EXTREME FIRE HAZARD. SGT MATESON, MANNING THE RAMP MINIGUN, WAS KNOCKED DOWN BY A MORTAR FRAGMENT IN THE LEFT SHOULDER. IGNORING HIS INJURY, SGT MATESON IMMEDIATELY RETURNED TO THE GUN, MAINTAINING CONTINUOUS RETURN FIRE AND MAKING NO EFFORT TO EXAMINE HIS OWN WOUND. SGT KILLINGHAM, AS ON THE PREVIOUS LANDINGS, WAS PROVIDING ADDITIONAL AR-15 FIRE SUPPORT ON BOTH SIDES OF THE HELICOPTER, AS WELL AS MONITORING

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AIRCRAFT PERFORMANCE FROM HIS FLIGHT MECHANIC'S POSITION. WITH THE MAIN FUEL LINE PUNCTURED, NUMBER ONE ENGINE FLAMED OUT, GOING IMMEDIATELY TO ZERO TORQUE AND RAW FUEL UNDER PRESSURE BEGAN VENTING INTO THE CABIN. INFORMED OF THE RAW FUEL IN THE CABIN BY SGT HARDING AND ANN MCXIVER, AND AWARE THAT SGT WILLINGHAM AND LT GRADLE WERE ALREADY RECONFIGURING THE AIRCRAFT FOR SINGLE ENGINE OPERATION, CAPT PURSER, IN A DISPLAY OF SUPERB FLYING SKILL, MURDED THE SINGLE ENGINE AIRCRAFT OUT OF THE LZ, SKIPPING THE SURFACE OF THE WATER TO GAIN DESPERATELY NEEDED AIRSPEED, EXTRACTING MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE FROM THE REMAINING ENGINE. BY THIS TIME LT GRADLE AND SGT WILLINGHAM HAD SHUT DOWN THE NUMBER ONE ENGINE AND STOPPED THE FUEL LEAK. THESE ACTIONS UNQUESTIONABLY SAVED THE AIRCRAFT. AWARE OF THE CRITICAL TACTICAL SITUATION ASHORE, CAPT PURSER ELECTED TO DIVERT TO THE USS CORAL SEA, THEREBY RELEASING HIS ESCORT AIRCRAFT ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. MAKING THEIR FIRST LANDING EVER ON AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER, CAPT PURSER'S CREW AGAIN DEMONSTRATED

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SUPERIOR FLYING SKILL AND OUTSTANDING CREW COORDINATION DURING THIS SINGLE ENGINE APPROACH, TOUCHING DOWN WITH ONLY 500 POUNDS OF USEABLE FUEL REMAINING. WHILE CAPT PURSER MADE THE "VISUAL" APPROACH TO THE CARRIER, LT GRADLE PROVIDED CRITICALLY NEEDED INSTRUMENT READINGS TO COORDINATE THE APPROACH. WITH SGT WILLINGHAM DIRECTING THE EFFORTS OF NAVAL MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL TOTALLY UNFAMILIAR WITH THE HH-53C, THE FUEL LINE WAS REPAIRED WITH RUBBER HOSE AND TAPE IN MINIMUM TIME. AWARE OF THE INCREASINGLY CRITICAL SITUATION ON THE ISLAND AND THAT DARKNESS WAS RAPIDLY APPROACHING, CAPT PURSER'S CREW TOOK OFF TO RETURN TO THE ISLAND AS SOON AS THE TEMPORARY REPAIRS TO THE FUEL LINE WERE COMPLETED. JOLLY GREEN 43 DEPARTED THE CORAL SEA AT 1700, ARRIVING AT KOH TANG ISLAND AT ABOUT 1730. FOR THE FIFTH TIME THAT DAY, THE CREW OF JOLLY GREEN 43 COMMITTED, AGAIN WITHOUT REGARD TO THEIR OWN SAFETY, THIS TIME IN THE FINAL EFFORT TO WITHDRAW THE REMAINING MARINES FROM THE WESTERN PERIMETER. FACING GROUND FIRE WHICH

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WAS EXTREMELY ACCURATE AND AT TIMES AS INTENSE AS EARLIER IN THE
 DAY, JOLLY GREEN 43 LANDED ON THE BEACH AND REMAINED IN THE EXPOSED
 LZ UNTIL 51 MARINES ON LOADED. WHILE APPROACHING A HOVER AND WHILE
 ON THE GROUND, SGTs HARDING AND BATESON AND A21 MCIVER RESPONDED
 TO THE CONSTANT AND INTENSE GROUND FIRE, USING THE ONE REMAINING
 MINIGUN ON THE RAMP AND THEIR AR-15S, TO MAXIMUM EFFECT. ONCE
 MORE JOLLY GREEN 43 SUSTAINED NUMEROUS HITS, INCLUDING A 7.62
 ROUND IN A MAIN ROTOR BLADE SPAR. AS CSF PERSONNEL WERE UNLOADING,
 LT GRADLE, MONITORING ALL RADIO CHANNELS AS WELL AS THE INTERCOM,
 REALIZED THAT JOLLY GREEN 44 HAD BEEN COMMITTED TO THE SAME LZ. BY
 THIS TIME IT WAS COMPLETELY DARK. HIS QUICK THINKING AND IMMEDIATE
 ACTION IN BRIEFLY ILLUMINATING JOLLY GREEN 43S POSITION WITH HIS
 SEARCH LIGHT, UNHESITATINGLY EXPOSING THE AIRCRAFTS POSITION TO
 HOSTILE OBSERVATION, PREVENTED A DEVASTATING CRASH WHICH WOULD
 HAVE ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE OCCURRED WITHOUT HIS ACTION--JOLLY GREEN
 44S SEARCH LIGHTS, LANDING LIGHTS, AND LOW LEVEL LIGHT TV WERE ALL

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INOPERATIVE AT THIS TIME. CAPT PURSER'S CREW ONCE MORE DISPLAYED EXTRAORDINARY COURAGE, FLYING SKILL, AND CREW COORDINATION IN RAPIDLY LOADING AND SUCCESSFULLY TAKING OFF WITH 54 FULLY LOADED MARINES, VERY CLOSE TO THE MAXIMUM LIFTING CAPACITY OF THE HH-53C. AFTER OFF LOADING THE 54 MARINES ON THE USS CORAL SEA, JOLLY GREEN REFUELED AND AGAIN RETURNED TO THE ISLAND, TO FIND OUT THAT THE LAST OF THE GSF HAD BEEN EXTRACTED JUST PRIOR TO THEIR ARRIVAL. RETURNING TO U-TAPAO, LOGGED 16.1 HOURS OF FLYING TIME. THE CREW, FACING THE DEVASTATING FIRE FROM THE ENEMY POSITIONS THAT HAD CLAIMED THREE HELICOPTERS DURING THE DAY, MADE FIVE SEPARATE APPROACHES TO A HOVER ON THE ISLAND, OFTEN WITHOUT USABLE AIRCRAFT WEAPONS, FORCING THEM TO RELY ON THEIR HAND HELD WEAPONS TO SUPPRESS GROUND FIRE. EVERY APPROACH WAS A CALCULATED RISK AGAINST HIGH ODDS, NECESSITATED BY THE MISSION REQUIREMENTS TO EITHER REINFORCE OR EXTRACT US MARINES. EVEN AFTER SUSTAINING SEVERE BATTLE DAMAGE THAT HAD INJURED ONE OF THE CREW AND RENDERED AN ENGINE INOPERATIVE,

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~~FROM:~~

TO:

J. CITATION FOR AIR FORCE CROSS: ON THAT DATE, WHILE ENGAGED IN A COMBAT ASSAULT OPERATION AGAINST A HEAVILY DEFENDED ISLAND, CAPTAIN PURSER'S AIRCRAFT CAME UNDER HEAVY AND CONSTANT GROUND FIRE WHILE INSERTING TWO SEPARATE CONTINGENT OF MARINES GROUND FORCES. IN SPITE OF BATTLE DAMAGE RECIEVED IN THERE ASSAULT OPERATIONS, CAPT PURSER ELECTED TO ATTEMPT THE EXTRACTION OF AN ISOLATED MARINE FORCE AND IN THIS ACTION HIS AIRCRAFT RECEIVED ADDITIONAL DAMAGE REQUIRING HIM TO DIVERT TO THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS CORAL SEA WHERE HE MADE A SINGLE ENGINE LANDING WITH ONLY 500 POUNDS OF USEABLE FUEL REMAINING. AWARE OF THE DESPERATE SITUATION ON THE ISLAND, HE SOUGHT EMERGENCY REPAIRS AND RETURNED AGAIN TO THE ISLAND, WHERE FACING THE SAME INTENSIVE GROUND FIRE AND THE ADDED HAZARD OF DARKNESS, HE WENT INTO THE LANDING ZONE PUTTING IN HEAVY FIRE OF HIS OWN AND EXTRACTED ONE OF THE LAST GROUPS OF MARINES ON THE ISLAND.

K. CITATION FOR SILVER STAR: ON THAT DATE, (NAME), AS A MEMBER

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FROM:

TO:

OF THE CREW OF A HH-53 HELICOPTER OPERATING IN A COMBAT ASSAULT AGAINST A HEAVILY DEFENDED ISLAND, CAME UNDER HEAVY AND CONTINUOUS GROUND FIRE AS HIS AIRCRAFT ENGAGED IN THE INSERTION OF TWO SEPARATE CONTINGENTS OF MARINE GROUND FORCES. THE AIRCRAFT RECEIVED ADDITIONAL DAMAGE ATTEMPTING TO EXTRACT AN ISOLATED GROUP OF MARINES AND HAD TO MAKE A SINGLE ENGINE EMERGENCY LANDING ON THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS CORAL SEA. BECAUSE OF THE DESPERATE SITUATION ON THE ISLAND EMERGENCY REPAIRS WERE MADE ENABLING THE AIRCRAFT TO RETURN AGAIN TO THE ISLAND, WHERE FACING THE SAME INTENSE GROUND FIRE AND THE ADDITIONAL HAZARD OF DARKNESS, THE EXTRACTION OF ONE OF THE LAST GROUPS OF MARINES ON THE ISLAND WAS ACCOMPLISHED.

GDS 1981.

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