



SGT. MICHAEL E. FISH

## AF CROSS GOES TO PARARESCUEMAN

### SERGEANT'S BRAVERY HELPS SAVE PATROL, HELICOPTER CREWMEN

TAN SON NHUT AB, Vietnam—Heroic efforts to rescue an Army patrol and downed helicopter crew have earned Sgt. Michael E. Fish the nation's second highest award for bravery.

Sergeant Fish was presented the Air Force Cross by Air Force Secretary Robert C. Seamans, Jr. during the secretary's visit here.

Cited for voluntarily risking his life for more than 15 hours, Sergeant Fish saved an Army UH-1 helicopter crewmember and also helped rescue others pinned down by deadly enemy fire.

The helicopter crew was shot down Feb. 18, 1969, while attempting to rescue a small Army patrol from an area near a North Vietnamese Army camp in a canyon 28 miles west of Tuy Hoa AB.

The Army asked for help and Air Force rescuers of the 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron's Det. 11 at Tuy Hoa answered the call. An aircrew from the detachment, including Sergeant Fish, flew into the hostile area in their HH-43 Pedro helicopter. They were accompanied by Army helicopter gunships to suppress enemy ground fire.

#### GUNSHIPS STRAFE AREA

Despite strafing by the gunships, heavy cross-fire from enemy automatic weapons entrenched in the mountainside opened up as the Pedro crew neared the crash site. Rescue attempts normally would be postponed until the enemy fire could be suppressed, but the condition of several of the survivors was described as "grave." The unarmed Pedro crew went in for the rescue.

As the rescue helicopter hovered a few feet above the thick jungle canopy, Sergeant Fish and another rescue specialist were lowered on a jungle penetrator through intense enemy fire.

Despite continuing enemy groundfire, three injured crewmembers were given emergency medical care and lifted to the hovering Pedro.

An Army UH-1 helicopter with a hoist then came to a hover over the crash site, and Sergeant Fish and others on the ground secured another patrol member to the hoist for evacuation.

Sergeant Fish found the pilot of the crashed helicopter seriously injured and pinned in the tangled wreckage. As Ser-

geant Fish worked to free him, the Army gunships had to leave the area to be refueled.

As the gunships departed, Sergeant Fish worked silently trying to free the pilots so as not to give away their position to the enemy. The pilot was given medical care and a sedative by Sergeant Fish.

More Army gunships arrived later and stilled four enemy soldiers stealing toward the crash site through a clearing about 100 yards from the survivors.

These gunships continued pounding the enemy positions as the patrol team fired at the enemy and Sergeant Fish tried to free the pilot. His efforts were hampered by a damaged metal saw, however and his hatchet and other hand tools were ineffective against the tangled wreckage.

#### HELICOPTERS LEAVE

At nightfall the helicopter crews had to give up their efforts, despite chances the enemy would attack the survivors during the night. Sergeant Fish and his assistant were instructed to leave the scene on a helicopter, but Sergeant Fish refused. Sergeant Fish told his assistant to inform the crew that he would remain at the site to give medical aid and try to free the pilot.

The young sergeant worked through the night caring for the pilot, who was intermittently in shock, and radioing instructions to flareships circling above.

"We heard enemy movement throughout the night, but they did not attack," one of the survivors reported later. "As it turned out, the enemy was setting up an ambush for the helicopters coming to help us in the morning," he said.

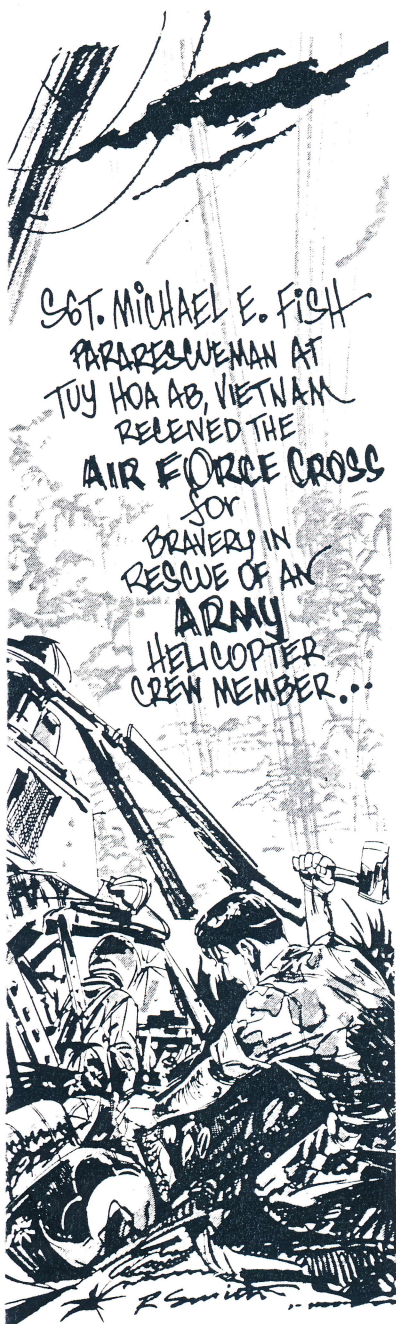
#### RESCUERS RETURN

As the enemy soldiers anticipated, the rescuers returned in the morning. The Pedro helicopter again hovered above the canopy, and another pararescue specialist and flight engineer with special rescue tools started down the penetrator.

With the rescuers suspended in midair and the Pedro hovering vulnerably, the enemy opened the heaviest cross-fire of the rescue attempt.

Army gunships fired back and the enemy weapons positions were silenced for a few minutes. This was long enough for Sergeant Fish and the others to free the pilot, and help hoist him to the waiting Pedro.

An Army UH-1 then hoisted Sergeant Fish and the remaining members of the ground party out of the area and flew them to safety.



SGT. MICHAEL E. FISH  
PARARESCUEMAN AT  
TUY HOA AB, VIETNAM  
RECEIVED THE  
AIR FORCE CROSS  
FOR  
BRAVERY IN  
RESCUE OF AN  
ARMY  
HELICOPTER  
CREWMEMBER...

DECLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
DETACHMENT 11, 38TH ARRSQ (MAC)  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96316



REPLY TO  
ATTN OF: 38-11 C

21 February 1969

SUBJECT: Mission Narrative Report (11-38-009-18 Feb 69)

TO: 3rd ARRGp *JCB* APO 96307 THRU: 38th ARRSq *JCB W* APO 96307 *2/11/69*

1. This report is submitted IAW ARRSM 55-2. 3rd ARRGp Supplement 1, 15 April 1968.
2. At 1630L Tonto 42 notified Detachment 11 that Mardigras 715, an Army UH-1 helicopter, had crashed 225 degrees, 25 miles from Tuy Hoa Air Base. Five personnel were believed trapped in the wreckage. Pedro 05 was refueled and scrambled at 1645, Crew; Nicholson, Wohlneck, Evans Fish and Reeves. UH-1 gunships had been requested from Phu Hiep AAF, 5 miles south of Tuy Hoa AB. Pedro 05 was vectored to the vicinity of the wreckage by Tuy Hoa Approach Control. The HH-43B located other aircraft in the area and was vectored over the downed aircraft, which crashed near the bottom of a steep, densely jungled mountain canyon at the 1600 foot elevation. It had been downed by ground fire while attempting to extract a 5 man long range patrol (LRP) which had requested to be picked up, as they were certain their position would be overrun during the night by the numerous Vietcong in the immediate area.
3. When Pedro 05 arrived at the scene one hoist equipped UH-1H, call sign Dustoff 83, was hovering over the crash and several UH-1F slicks were flying in the immediate vicinity. They reported no groundfire. Cutie 11, a forward air controller flying an O-1, was controlling the mission. Pedro 05 approached up the valley to the site, turning 180 degrees to be facing out of the valley during the recovery. A hover was established approximately 175 feet above the ground, with surrounding trees extending above the rotor blades. A tree was ten feet directly below the helicopter. Sgt Fish and Sgt Reeves were lowered individually to the ground by Sgt Evans, followed by the para-rescue medical kit, the crash entry kit and a gasoline powered crash entry saw, which proved to be inoperative. In order to lower personnel and equipment to the crash through the six foot hole in the double tree canopy it was necessary to hover with the rotor blades within two feet of a tree on the right side. SSgt Reeves and Sgt Fish splinted the first man, with two broken legs and two broken arms, and placed him in the semi-rigid litter. He was hoisted aboard by Sgt Evans, who was required to remove him from the semi-rigid litter, which was also required for recovery of the second and third victims who also had extensive injuries. The semi-rigid litter was left on

Classified by *DA 11 24 ARRSQ*  
SUBJECT TO GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION  
SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

WHICH REQUIRE DOWNGRADED AT TWO  
THREE INTERVIEWS.  
DECLASSIFIED ON *31 Dec 75*

DECLASSIFIED

Atch 7'

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

the ground for use by Dustoff 83. The hover during the recovery was further complicated by hostile fire from the surrounding hillsides and the turbulent rotor wash from a dustoff UH-1 hovering near the HH-43B. The RESCAP gunships fired their door guns and miniguns at the enemy positions, 100 to 200 yards distance. Due to the serious condition of the survivors on board, Pedro 05 departed the scene to a clearing approximately five miles from the base of the mountains. An Army UH-1 helicopter landed alongside. Two crewmembers assisted Sgt Evans in transferring the patients aboard the UH-1 for transportation to the U.S. Army evacuation hospital at Phu Hiep AAF. During this transfer Dustoff 83 picked up one LRP team member and one deceased crewmember with the semi-rigid litter. Pedro 05 returned to the crash after Dustoff 83 had departed with low fuel. The forest penetrator was lowered to the ground and for ten minutes the HH-43B hovered while Sgt Reeves and Sgt Fish worked to free the trapped co-pilot. Due to their concentrated efforts they could not monitor the radio and could not hear the loudhailers because of the noise from the helicopter. Pedro 05 reached bingo fuel and was forced to leave the four LRPs, the trapped co-pilot and the two rescue crewmembers. Gunships continued to suppress the enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire. Pedro 05 landed at Tuy Hoa Air Base at 1855L.

4. Pedro 24 was delayed taking off on the mission as it was undergoing maintenance and had one set of blades removed. The rotor blades were re-installed and the helicopter was test hopped. Pedro 24, Crew; Fogg, Whitney, King and McAllister, launched on the mission at 1810, and was vectored to the crash site by Tuy Hoa Approach Control. Upon arriving at the crash site, radio contact was made with an Army gunship and he pointed out the exact location of the downed helicopter. The wreckage was extremely hard to see due to the terrain and foliage. Because of the high gross weight of the helicopter and the high density altitude, Pedro 24 was required to use almost all available power to hover above the trees. By taking full advantage of the wind and lowering the helicopter into a small opening in the trees, enough power was available to pick up one man, the firefighter who had been deployed by Pedro 05. Just prior to the hoist pickup an Army gunship spotted several enemy moving toward the sight. The orbiting gunships strafed the enemy position and were credited with four enemy killed less than 200 meters from the crash site. When the firefighter had been safely hoisted aboard, Pedro 24 experienced a loss of radio communications. During this time the RESCAP gunships departed the area due to low fuel, leaving Pedro 24 with no cover for approximately ten minutes. Pedro 24 landed at Tuy Hoa at 1935L. While enroute to Tuy Hoa, Pedro 24 passed Pedro 05 who was enroute to the scene.

5. Pedro 05 re-launched at 1900L, Crew; Nicholson, Wohlneck and Evans. Tuy Hoa Approach Control provided radar vectors to the scene. Pedro,05 orbited at 7500 feet over the mountains awaiting a rendezvous with a UH-1 flare ship and gunships. Extreme darkness and lack of visual references due to haze and low clouds necessitated instrument flight. The rendezvous was unsuccessful and Pedro 05 returned to base at 2005L. Preparations were made to attempt

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

the recovery at first light. Heavy duty equipment for cutting and bending the metal in the helicopter was obtained because the normal crash entry kit was insufficient. The additional equipment included two chain hoists, another gasoline powered circular saw with metal cutting blade, miscellaneous pry bars, and a hydraulic jack.

6. After Pedro 24 departed the crash, Sgt Fish and the four remaining LRPs continued to attempt to free the co-pilot's foot, working in the semi-darkness with a flashlight. It became apparent that nothing further could be done that night because of the noise which the efforts produced, plus the man's cries of pain. Sgt Fish administered morphine to ease the pain and quiet the man so their exact position would not be compromised. He made the man as comfortable as possible, covering him with a blanket. Throughout the night Sgt Fish and the LRPs remained beside the pilot and maintained a constant guard for the enemy, who could be heard all night moving in very close proximity. Enemy personnel constantly moved about in a creek bed 30 yards downhill from the wreckage. Sgt Fish checked his patient frequently through the night and treated him for shock. Doctors credited his actions during the night for saving the man's life. An AC-47 was stationed continuously overhead to drop illumination flares over the ground team. The LRP team fully anticipated having their position overrun that night. At one point the LRPs heard extremely close sounds and fired point blank into the darkness. Sgt Fish advised the rescue aircraft of the enemy action upon their arrival the next morning, and assisted in the removal and rescue of the co-pilot when additional help arrived.

7. Pedros 05 and 24 departed Tuy Hoa at 0620L 19 Feb 69, with radar vector to the crash site. Two UH-1H slicks arrived over the area and located the site by radio coordination and a visual sighting on a strobe light. Pedro 05, crew; Nicholson, Whitney, King, Margagliano, McAllister was primary recovery aircraft. Pedro 24, crew; Austin, Downing, Evans and Martin was high ship for the mission. Arrival of gunships was delayed approximately 30 minutes for maintenance. Pedros 05 and 24 orbited the scene until their arrival. Crown 7 coordinated the effort through JSARC. Pedro 05 was cleared into the site once the gunships were on station. Pedro 05 established a hover over the wreckage. Sgts Margagliano and McAllister were lowered to the ground followed by the crash entry equipment. Hostile fire was coming from surrounding hills 100 to 200 yards away. Pedro 24 departed at this time to refuel in order to provide overlapping coverage with Pedro 05. Pedro 05 climbed above 4000 feet to loiter and save fuel while the co-pilot was being freed. The man was free and ready to be picked up approximately 20 minutes later. Pedro 05 returned to recover the pilot with the semi-rigid litter, one LRP, TSgt Margagliano and SSgt McAllister. During the pickup heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire was encountered. One UH-1 was struck by one round, no other reported damage. UH-1 gunships directed suppressive machine gun and minigun fire at the sources of the fire, which continued. Personnel in the cabin of Pedro 05 reported visually sighting enemy forces with guns traversing the hillside approximately 100 yards to the rear during the pickup. Pedro 05 departed the site for fuel. Fuel was insufficient to fly to

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

3.

DECLASSIFIED

Atch 73

Phu Hiep without refueling. The patient and LRP were taken to the 31st USAF Dispensary at Tuy Hoa while Pedro 05 refueled at the alert pad, landing at 0845L.

8. When Pedro 05 left the crash site Mardi Gras 138, a hoist equipped Army UH-1, began to recover personnel as Pedro 24 was not yet at the scene. Sgt Fish boarded the forest penetrator and one LRP with full field gear sat opposite him, with his legs over those of the PJ. As they ascended they became entangled in a tree. The hoist operator did not observe this. Sgt Fish fended off the branches as he was pulled upward. The safety strap, around the LRP's back slipped upward around his neck and he began slipping downward on Sgt Fish's legs. The LRP and PJ clung desperately to each other and Sgt Fish straightened his legs horizontally to support the man. They were spinning rapidly as they approached the helicopter. The LRP's back pack caught on the skid as they were pulled upward. The man began to slip more. Attempts of Sgt Fish to hold the man and the hoist operator to grab him failed and he was pulled from the forest penetrator, falling to his death. His body was recovered and the UH-1 flew to the 91st Army hospital at Phu Hiep AAF.

9. After refueling Pedro 24 departed Tuy Hoa at 0810L and flew directly to the crash scene. Enroute Pedro 24 had contacted Crown 7 and advised them that Pedro 24 would be in the area within ten minutes and would be able to remain for one and a half hours. Pedro 24 orbited the area for approximately ten minutes while the Army UH-1 completed their pickup. Pedro 24 established a hover over the crash site and began hoisting the remaining two survivors, plus equipment, from the site. No ground fire was received at this time however the pararescueman sighted four Viet Cong coming down a hillside approximately 100 yards to the rear of Pedro 24. After recovering the last two men, the pilot turned approximately 90 degrees to avoid mountains and departed. Pedro 24 received ground fire from extremely close range after traveling about 200 yards from the crash site. Gunships were flying cover and came in to suppress the ground fire. Pedro 24 was not hit and delivered the two survivors to the 91st Army hospital. Pedro 24 returned to Tuy Hoa at 0930L.

10. Pedro 05 refueled and departed Tuy Hoa at 0855L with one LRP and injured co-pilot who had previously been taken to the 31st USAF Dispensary. They were taken to the 91st Army hospital at Phu Hiep AAF. Sgt Fish was brought back to Tuy Hoa on the return flight, landing at 0925L.

Crewmembers were: 18 February  
Pedro 05

Mission #1  
RCC Capt Daniel A. Nicholson  
RCCP Capt Charles T. Wohlneck  
RS SSgt Norman F. Reeves  
PJ Sgt Richard E. Evans  
PJ Sgt Michael E. Fish

Mission #2  
RCC Capt Daniel A. Nicholson  
RCCP Capt Charles T. Wohlneck  
PJ Sgt Richard E. Evans

DECLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Mission #1. Pedro 24

RCC Capt Henry P. Fogg  
RCCP Capt Charles T. Wohlneck  
FE SSgt Leroy W. King  
FF SSgt Robert A. McAllister

Mission #1. 19 February

Pedro 05

Mission #2.

RCC Capt Daniel A. Nicholson  
RCCP Maj Edgar R. Whitney  
FE TSgt Thomas B. Margagliano  
FE SSgt Leroy W. King  
FF SSgt Robert A. McAllister

RCC Capt Daniel A. Nicholson  
RCCP Maj Edgar R. Whitney  
FE TSgt Thomas B. Margagliano  
PJ Sgt Michael E. Fish

Mission # 1 and 2. Pedro 24

RCC Capt William F. Austin  
RCCP Maj Morgan A. Downing  
FE SSgt Raphael C. Martin  
PJ Sgt Richard E. Evans

Results of the missions were: 7 combat saves, U.S. Army, 4 crewmembers

*Daniel A. Nicholson*

DANIEL A. NICHOLSON, Capt, USAF  
Rescue Crew Commander

APPROVED:

*Morgan A. Downing*

MORGAN A. DOWNING, Major, USAF  
Commander

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED

5.

Atch 75