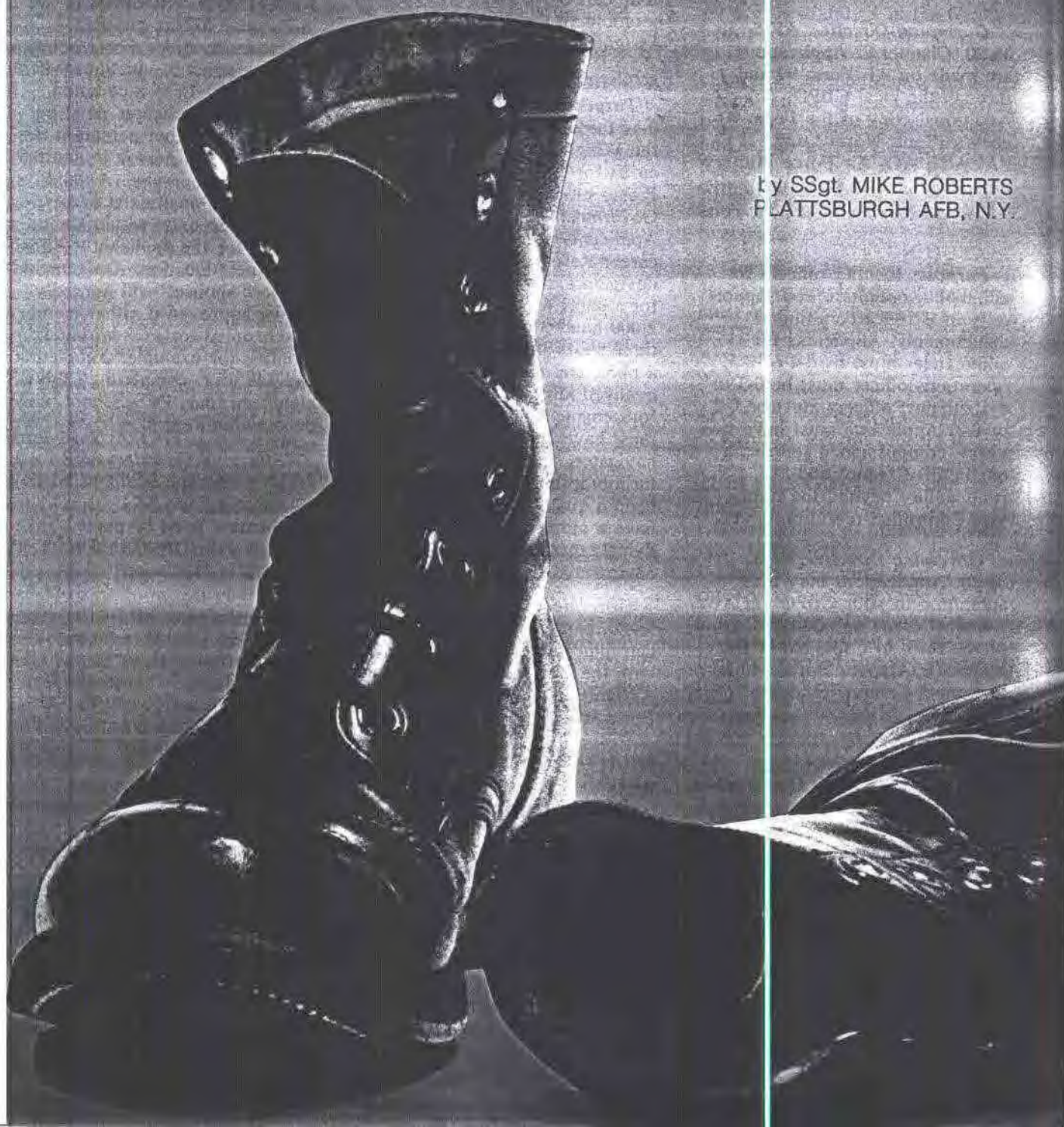


TO GET TO THE SURVIVORS,
THEY HAD TO COPE WITH DARKNESS, FOG,
LOW FUEL, AND ENEMY TROOPS, BUT

THEY KEPT TRYING

by SSgt. MIKE ROBERTS
PLATTSBURGH AFB, N.Y.



Christmas was only five days away when *Straw 02*, a B-52 returning from a mission in Southeast Asia, was knocked out of the sky by a SAM. The crew bailed out on the border between northern Laos and North Vietnam and began what seemed to be a lifetime of waiting.

For the rescue and recovery crews of *Jolly Green One* and *Two* at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand, dreams of Christmas dissolved in the early hours of December 20, 1972. The sun was somewhere on the other side of the world when the rescue crews got the scramble. They dashed through the dark for their HH-53C *Jolly Green* helicopters. Their mission would last more than four hours, and lead to Silver Stars for two crewmen and Distinguished Flying Crosses for the others. "Rocket!"

The warning brought instant action from Capt. Douglas F. Strahl, commanding *Jolly One*. Maneuvering briskly, he evaded the unguided rocket. The two helicopters continued on their mission to recover the downed airmen.

As they neared a forward orbit point, *Sandy One*, the on-scene commander flying an A-7, radioed instructions to the helicopters. The *Sandy* had heard from five survivors on the B-52's six-man crew. He identified them as *Straw 02 Alpha*, *Bravo*, *Delta*, *Echo*, and *Foxtrot*. *Straw 02 Charley*—the only man with a human code name—had not yet contacted the A-7 pilot.

"Proceed toward search and rescue area," *Sandy One* directed.

Although large concentrations of North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops were reported to be along

the route to the search area, no hostile activity had been observed in the immediate area of the survivors.

Patches of low stratus clouds began to appear in the valleys as *Sandy One* joined the *Jollys* and began directing the recovery.

Jolly One went in after *Alpha* and *Jolly Two* headed for *Bravo*.

"I'm under the clouds on the side of a steep hill. I'm injured and unable to move through the terrain," *Jolly One's* man radioed. It was the cue that Sgt. Stephen L. Caldwell, a pararescue specialist, had been waiting for. Captain Strahl skimmed the tops of the clouds until the airman's location was pinpointed. He then began a spiral descent through what had now become dense fog. He watched as his radar altitude needle dropped from 1,000 to 150 feet during four 360 degree turns. A heavy fog still blanketed the *Jolly*, though, so Strahl ordered an abort, and the chopper pulled away.

They tried once more. No go. On their third descent, several holes started to appear in the cloud layer. Strahl flew into one of the breaks and began a hovering let-down. For 10 minutes, the *Jolly* slowly descended 350 feet into the fog. Suddenly, the clouds thickened and closed in around the helicopter. Again, they aborted the attempt.

"*Jolly One*, maybe you should try *Delta's* position. The weather and terrain may be better there," *Sandy One* radioed.



"Roger. Stand by Alpha. We have your location and will return."

Strahl and his crew headed for Delta's position, but found it covered with clouds also. About a mile away, however, the clouds ended. Captain Strahl maneuvered the helicopter through a narrow ravine with villages—possibly hostile—on either side. As they approached the edge of the clouds, ground fire faced upward from one of the villages. Immediately Strahl went into a descending 180-degree turn until he was below the overcast, using the clouds to hide from the enemy gunners.

Strahl headed back to where the downed airman waited. Occasionally, Strahl was forced to maneuver below the tree canopy on each side of the ravine. Finally he entered a hover just 50 feet west and 140 feet above Delta.

Sergeant Caldwell, lowering down through the dense jungle, found the airman about 15 minutes later, and helped get him aboard the helicopter.

Meanwhile, Jolly Two wasn't having any better time of it than Jolly One was. But Echo had heard the helicopter and contacted Jolly Two.

"Jolly Two this is Echo. I can hear you. I'm in the clear just above Bravo's position."

"Roger. Stand by Bravo. We have your location, but will pick up Echo first. Echo, vector us toward your position."

Echo was about halfway between the top of the ridge and the top of the cloud layer. He radioed when the helicopter was directly over him.

The radio crackled again as Sandy One came on the air. "Keep your heads up. You've got two small villages, one on top of the ridge and one on the outer side of a small hump in the ridge."

"Roger."

The soldiers aboard Jolly Two soon spotted the survivor. As Capt.

Roger C. Bradley, Jolly Two's commander, jockeyed the helicopter into position, SSgt. Jimmie D. Victor, who was operating the hoist, got a full view of the survivor. With no difficulty Echo found the penetrator which had been dropped to him. In short order, he was hoisted above the jungle growth to safety.

Two B-52 crewmen up, four to go.

Captain Bradley headed back for Bravo. Just over the low clouds, Jolly Two went into a hover as the downed man reported the helicopter above him. Almost as soon as the rescue craft entered hover, Bravo began vectoring it to his location. Radar altimeter readings and reports from the scanners pinpointed him on the side of a very steep slope. Bradley tried a slow descending hover several times in an effort to make a hole for visual descent, but it was hopeless. Gray mist engulfed the helicopter and Captain Bradley began an immediate vertical instrument climb out.

After more than 40 minutes of hovering, fuel was rapidly becoming a factor in the recovery attempts.

"Bravo, we're running low on fuel. We'll return after refueling is accomplished," Bradley told the downed man.

Both helicopters headed for a refueling rendezvous. For a moment, Captain Strahl thought he might not make it. Flying lower than Jolly Two, he suddenly found himself taking ground fire.

"We've been hit by ground fire in the floor and right side," he reported, and immediately added, "No significant damage, though."

While the Jollys were refueling, Sandy One radioed that the clouds were dissipating.

"Another flight of Jolly Greens is an hour away. Return and pick up the remaining survivors while the weather is good," he ordered.

Jolly One immediately went for

Alpha as Jolly Two headed for Bravo.

Captain Strahl's helicopter was too heavy to hover, so he began dumping fuel. It was then that TSgt. John K. Carlson, a pararescue technician, spotted 10 armed enemy troops about a quarter of a mile from Alpha.

"Sandy One, there are enemy troops about a quarter of a mile on the other side of the hill from Alpha!"

"Roger, Jolly One. We'll get 'em." The Sandys rolled in and quickly eliminated the enemy force.

Alpha was located about one quarter of the way up an extremely deep and narrow ravine. Making a steep downhill approach, Strahl brought the helicopter into a hover above the airman's position. Caldwell again volunteered to help the survivor on the ground. He was lowered and quickly located his man.

He and Alpha reported ground fire, but no one could identify the source. They concluded that the enemy was firing into the air for harassment.

Because of Alpha's injuries and the steep, rugged terrain, Caldwell had trouble moving him to the hoist. Finally, after 15 minutes of tense activity, both persons were pulled aboard the helicopter.

Three members of the crew had now been recovered.

While Jolly One was recovering Alpha, Jolly Two had located Bravo on a steep, heavily forested portion of the ridge. But before Bradley could make an attempt to recover Bravo, Foxtrot was on the radio, saying he had head injuries. Again, Bravo was to be disappointed, as the chopper moved to first recover the injured Foxtrot.

Another Sandy directed Jolly Two towards Foxtrot's location about two miles away. Moving towards the end of a small dead-end slope in the valley, Jolly Two heard a third say he could hear

the helicopter approaching.

"Ignite a flare," Bradley radioed, and brought the helicopter into a hover while the crew scanned for smoke. They spotted it about 200 yards to the rear of the helicopter, just inside some trees on the edge of a clearing that contained several huts. Slowly, Bradley backed the helicopter along the ridge toward the village and the survivor. As the tail rotor moved over the edge of the clearing, *Foxtrot* reported the helicopter directly overhead.

Sergeant Victor sighted the airman and lowered the penetrator, threading it through the jungle growth. *Foxtrot*, apparently in shock, became disoriented and could not find the penetrator despite repeated instructions and the fact that it was only five yards away. TSgt. Charles Salome dropped a flare. It landed beside the penetrator, and *Foxtrot* finally climbed on. They hoisted him up through the trees onto the helicopter.

With SSgt. Hulen C. Hammock, Jr. manning the minigun and covering the village, *Jolly Two* left the area and returned to get *Bravo*, who popped a smoke flare as the helicopter approached his position. They made the pickup without incident.

Five members were now aboard the *Jollys*.

Sandy 12 had been searching for *Charley*, and discovered villages on top of the ridge. He suggested that *Jolly Two* remain low until he gained sufficient airspeed to execute a rapid climb.

Jolly One reported *Alpha* on the verge of deep shock.

"All guns have been stowed and doors closed in an effort to keep him warm," Captain Strahl told the rescue force. "We are heading for the medical facilities at Udorn."

"Roger, *Jolly One*."

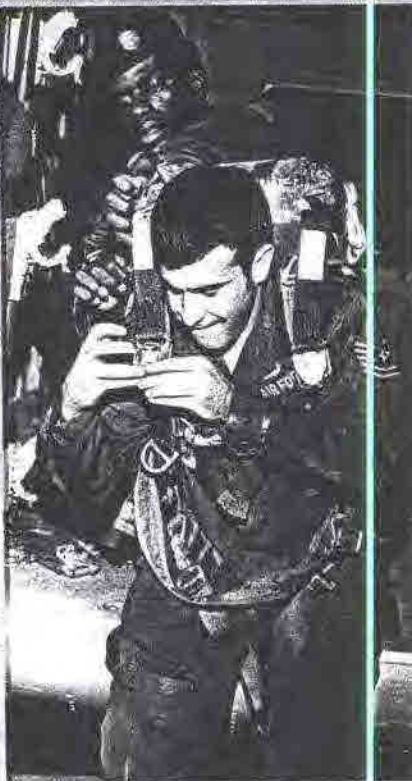
"*Jolly Two*, this is *Sandy 12*. I'm receiving a very weak beeper along the ridge."

"Roger, *Sandy 12*."

The three survivors aboard *Jolly Two* told the crew that *Charley* had been seriously injured before he ejected, so he might not be able to use his survival radio. Replacement helicopters were still about 30 minutes away. Since the survivors aboard *Jolly Two* were in good condition, both they and the crew were all for helping *Sandy 12* investigate the beeper.

Once over the ridge, *Jolly Two* picked up the beeper signal, too. Bradley slowed his helicopter to a hover taxi about 500 feet below the ridge and established the point where the signal was strongest. Salome volunteered to go down

Photo by Sgt. FRANK McINTYRE



TSgt. Charles F. Salome suits up for a pararescue mission with help from Sgt. Arthur F. Morrison.

and try to locate the signal and hopefully the missing *Charley*.

On the ground, Salome checked out two areas while the helicopter hovered above.

"Area one and two are both negative," he reported. "Wait a

minute! I see a maroon colored cloth in the brush. Carefully, Sergeant Salome approached the cloth. It was an air rescue and recovery beret, dropped by one of the crewmembers in the hovering chopper. Sergeant Salome put the beret in his pocket and continued the search, keeping a wary eye on the village at the top of the hill.

He found some footprints. "They're about three hours old," he told the men above. Salome decided to follow the prints, which led up and over the ridge.

Sandy 12 came on the radio again to warn the sergeant of the villages on the other side of the ridge. "Don't go over the top," he cautioned.

"Roger, *Sandy 12*. I'm already over the top and can see the villages above the elephant grass," Salome told him.

After more than 40 minutes on the ground, Sergeant Salome was relieved by two pararescuemen from the replacement helicopters that since had arrived. *Jolly Two* and the three survivors headed home.

All that the pararescuemen from the replacement chopper could find was a parachute, a helmet, and a survival radio. The survival radio was turned off, the weak beeper signal stopped. They believed the equipment was *Echo's*. There was no clue to *Charley's* whereabouts. The replacements headed home.

Jolly One and *Two* received the traditional wetdown when they arrived back at base.

Both Salome and Caldwell received the Silver Star for their assistance to the survivors and their efforts to recover them in a hostile region of Laos.

The rescue of all but one member of the crew under discouraging circumstances proved that while the rescue man's official motto is "That Others May Live," "We Keep Trying" would do just as well. ✪

~~SECRET~~

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	<u>DATE</u>	<u>CALL SIGN</u>	<u>TYPE A/C</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>FOB</u>	<u>RESULTS</u>
(S)	5 Oct	Ranger 23	F-111	18N, 103E	2	2 MIA
(S)	6 Oct	Buick 03	F-4	Unknown	2	2 Saves
(U)	28 Oct	Unknown	Navy Ship	15N, 109E	1	1 Recovered (Deceased)
(S)	4 Nov	Sabre 73	Cobra	MR-1	2	2 Saves
(S)	4 Nov	Sabre 16	OH-1	MR-1	3	1 KIA 2 Saves
(S)	21 Nov	Joe Hop 1	F-4	Thailand	2	2 MIA
(U)	21 Nov	Baron 56	EC-47	NKP	10	2 KIA 8 Saves
(S)	22 Nov	Olive 02	B-52	Thailand	6	6 Saves
(S)	2 Dec	Hobo 01	A-7	19N, 101E	1	1 MIA
(S)	20 Dec	Brass 02	B-52	Hanoi	6	1 KIA 5 Saves
(S)	21 Dec	Spectre 17	AC-130	15N, 106E	16	2 Saves 14 MIA
(S)	27 Dec	ASH 02	B-52	NKP	6	6 Saves
(S)	28 Dec	NOY-2	T-28	17N, 105E	1	1 MIA

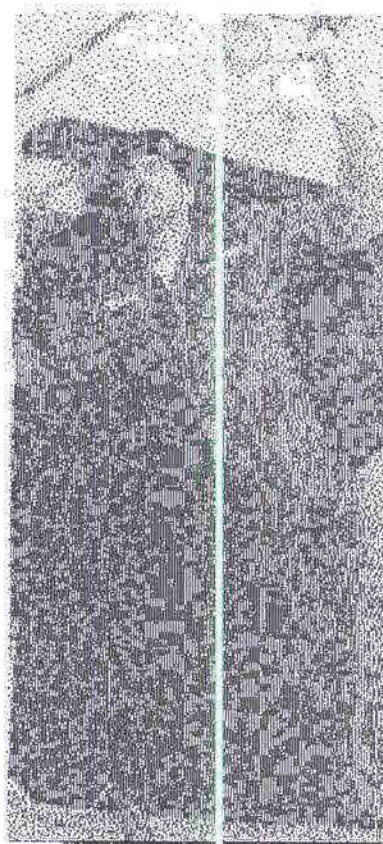
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PJ earns Silver Star

EGLIN AFB, FL—Sgt. Stephen L. Caldwell, a 55th ARRSq. PJ here, was recently awarded the Silver Star for his performance of duties in Southeast Asia. He was also presented the Air Medal and Distinguished Flying Cross.

According to the citations accompanying the awards, Sergeant Caldwell distinguished himself during military operations against an opposing armed force near Ban Ban, Laos Dec. 20, 1972. He descended on an HH-53 hoist to aid two injured American airmen. With hostile fire nearby, he gave emergency treatment to the survivors and helped them get to the rescue hoist.



Sergeant Caldwell

FYI: Just received the 51st PJ Silver Star Citation from Janis Salome.
TSgt
Salome's mission took place in Laos near Ban Ban, Laos on 20 Dec 1972.
Hoo
Ya!.. HN

-----Original Message-----

From: Robert LaPointe [mailto:rlapointe@gci.net]
Sent: Tuesday, March 26, 2002 11:58 AM
To: Hickson Bruce H CMSgt Det 1, 342 TRS/CM
Subject: RE: PJ Silver Star Citation (McComb) (50)

Great progress! I still have more too go through and will let you know
when
I have finished looking at all my stuff

LATER

-----Original Message-----

From: Hickson Bruce H CMSgt Det 1, 342 TRS/CM
[mailto:Bruce.Hickson@kirtland.af.mil]
Sent: Tuesday, March 26, 2002 4:27 AM
To: Lapointe Robert (Home) (E-mail)
Cc: John Cassidy (E-mail); 342 TRS/CC Kauffmann Steven M Major DET1
(E-mail); 342 TRS/CSS Billig Carey L SSgt Det 1 (E-mail)
Subject: PJ Silver Star Citation (McComb) (50)

Bob:

FYI: Just received McCombs citation along with the certificate and
"Special
Order #G-1782, dated 21 Oct 1967" listing not only McComb, but Hackney
&
Northern. The order references (15 July 1967 for Hackney's mission);
(18
July 1967 for McComb's mission); and (15 July 1967 for Northern's
mission.)

Great stuff!

Bruce