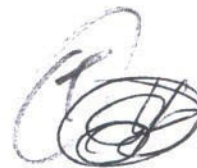


MISSION SUMMARY
AC-47 DOWN AT A SHAU



At 1317 hours, 9 March 1966 Panama notified the Rescue Control Center at Danang AB that an AC-47 was down with seven survivors. Survivors were said to be in voice contact with an A-1 and C-1 aircraft in the crash area. The primary and secondary alert HH-43F helicopters were airborne at 1327. The initial location was given as 53 miles on the 169° radial from Danang. Approximately twenty minutes after the departure, JCI personnel changed the crash location to 53 miles on the 279° radial from Danang. We corrected course and headed 310° to return to the correct track. After several minutes on a heading of 310° it was necessary to climb IFR through cloud layers to get to VFR On Top at 9,000 feet MSL.

It was impossible to establish radar contact with the JCI due to lack of IFF, however after a short period radio contact was established with the on the scene control aircraft and an airborne DF was initiated. This airborne DF was later passed to the RESCAP aircraft as we approached the crash area. We were informed at this time that the area around the crash site was hostile and under ground fire, but as there were A-1 aircraft in the area for fire suppression we decided to continue the mission.

The weather in the crash area was overcast with a cloud layer from about 300 feet to 3,000 feet MSL. This layer had a few isolated breaks where it was just possible to see the ground. There was another overcast layer from 4,000 to 5,500 feet MSL. The upper layer also had occasional breaks.

The RESCAP A-1 aircraft climbed to the top of the upper layer through two of these breaks that were offset by a few miles. We made a rendezvous with the A-1 and started a descent with the secondary helicopter following. The primary alert helicopter was able to follow the A-1 through both layers with some intermittent IFR, however the secondary alert helicopter could not

find the break in the lower layer of clouds and became separated.

While the A-1 returned to the crash site to provide fire support against the VC, we orbited below a break in the lower overcast while the secondary helicopter made a DE' steer to our position. We then joined up below the lower layer.

The crash site was about three miles down a valley from the point where we penetrated the lower layer. A-1 and O-1 aircraft were flying in the area and the A-1's were strafing VC positions. Although jet aircraft were in the area and VFR On Top, it was not possible for them to descend as the valley was only about one mile wide where the base of the clouds intercepted the side of the mountains. This provided extremely limited maneuvering space even for the A-1 aircraft.

When we initiated our dash for the 7 survivors, the RESCAP informed us that there was heavy VC automatic weapons and small arms fire in the area. He also told us that we would have to fly over the VC positions to reach the crash site. The valley floor was a dense jungle with trees about 100 feet tall. We went toward the crash "on the deck" at 95 knots and below the level of the tallest trees, dodging them enroute. The O-1's then reported small arms fire all along our path, however, I feel the combination of low altitude, speed, surprise, and tree cover, kept us from being hit. The O-1's further reported the VC to be about 30 to 40 meters west of the crash and moving in for another attack. I knew we would have to land as we couldn't take time for hoist operations and the helicopter would be an easy target while hovering above the crash. I wanted to put the AO-47 between the helicopter and the main VC force during the pickup. We flew directly toward the location where the AO-47 was expected to be and as soon as it came in sight we executed a quick stop maneuver, which

carried us slightly beyond the crash to a small hill about 75 feet away. The secondary aircraft was just to our left and behind us. After hovering over the hill momentarily, we moved closer to the AC-47 and placed the nose wheels of the helicopter against the side of the hill and hovered with our rear wheels off the ground. This maneuver kept the AC-47 between the helicopter and the attacking VC forces for possible protection from the automatic weapons fire. At this time, 3 survivors ran from the crash and entered the rear of the helicopter. As the Helicopter Mechanic (HM) and the Rescue and Survival Technician (RS) helped the survivors into the helicopter, they made visual contact with the VC about 40 meters away. The crew did not attempt to fire on the VC as they were helping the survivors into the helicopter.

The original plan was to effect recovery of 4 survivors in the first helicopter and the remaining survivors in the second helicopter. After the first group jumped into the helicopter the HM said, "let's go," and the second helicopter moved in as we moved out. When the remaining survivors did not appear, the HM and RS of the second bird deployed to the crash to investigate while the A-1's made a fire suppression run on the advancing VC. The HM and RS reached the downed aircraft while under heavy small arms fire. They entered the AC-47 and searched it from the cockpit to the tail. During this search they were subjected to intense fire from an unknown position. The search resulted in the location of two deceased crew members. While attempting to return to the helicopter, they were again fired on and pinned down by a machine gun and small arms outside the AC-47. An A-1 made a close straffing pass which dispersed the enemy, and during the confusion the HM and RS made another run for the helicopter. One more machine gun burst tore up the ground between

them as they ran, however another A-1 pass suppressed the fire. The HM and RS returned safely to the helicopter after expending 40 M-16 rounds to cover their escape.

While the crew of the second helicopter was on the ground, the first group of survivors informed us that the remainder of the AC-47 crew were dead. We immediately alerted the secondary aircraft to depart. With two crewmen out of the second aircraft the secondary RSC picked his helicopter up to a high hover over the crash to try and alert his crew. After noting the helicopter landing again, the HM and RS returned to their aircraft as described above. Lack of communications with the crew on the ground could have been disastrous as the higher hover compromised the helicopter protection from the trees, hill, and the crashed AC-47. Bodies were not recovered because of the heavy ground fire nor was an attempt made to locate the missing crewman.

Both helicopters made an immediate departure into the clouds and climbed IFR to VFR On Top; the climb was made at a low airspeed and high rate of climb in the general direction of the valley to avoid contact with the mountains. When reaching VFR On Top, I relayed to the OGI agency the fact that there were only six crewmembers on the AC-47, three were saved, two were dead, and one missing. We also asked for a vector to Danang AB as our fuel was short and we couldn't afford to search.

The severity of the ground fire is evidenced by the fact that although all six crewmembers survived the crash, two of the crewmembers were killed by ground fire and the other three were wounded. The missing man was presumed to be dead. Two of the wounded were serious and one was critical due to a severed artery in his arm and loss of blood. Enroute, the survivors were given medical aid for shock.

One of the survivors, Sgt Turner, stated that the VC had made four attacks on the crash and had been driven off by their fire and the A-1 fire. Two of the men had been killed on the fourth attack and a third had been caught outside the crash. When they could not locate the third man orally or visually, the remaining survivors figured that he was also killed on the fourth attack wave, and told us that all three were dead when we recovered them. The survivors were told by an O-1 that the helicopters were on the way in but that the VC were also advancing with their fifth attack wave, and were then only 40 to 50 meters out. The survivors were prepared to dash to the helicopter but carried their weapons for defense enroute, as it was debateable as to the helicopter or the VC arriving first. The survivors believe we picked them up before the VC got into position as there was only sporadic small arms fire from the advancing VC during the first pickup. This can be generally confirmed by the fact that there was no automatic weapon fire until after the second aircraft was on the ground.

The excellent cover provided by the A-1's was very important to the success of this mission. It would not have been possible to conduct the mission without their fire support while we made our approach and pickup. The A-1 fire delayed the fifth VC attack long enough for our helicopters to dash in and out making the save. The higher speed jet aircraft which were on top could not operate in the confined airspace nor provide the very close support we had and badly needed. Another factor that contributed to the success was the speed of the approach and pickup and the close coordination between the primary and secondary aircraft that allowed the secondary aircraft to depart no longer

5

than four minutes after we first spotted the crash. If we had been in the area another five minutes or arrived five minutes later the VC would have prevented a successful conclusion.

CREWS:

PRIMARY:	Capt Donald J. Couture,	RCC, Oak Harbor, Ohio
	Capt Harold A. Solberg,	CP, Spokane, Washington
	SSgt David L. Lancaster,	EM, Lava Hot Springs, Idaho
	A2C Albert W. Foster III,	RS, Virginia Beach, Virginia
SECONDARY:	1st Lt Arthur F. Machado,	RCC, New Bedford, Mass.
	Capt John B. Kneen,	CP, Burlington, Vermont
	SSgt Curtis F. Yancy,	EM, Odessa, Texas
	SSgt David J. Wheeler,	RS, Salina, Kansas

DONALD J. COUTURE, Capt, USAF
RCC

3. We've all read and heard vivid accounts of the battle at As Han Special Forces Camp on 9 Mar 66. For the men of Det 7, 38th ARRSq, that battle will live in their memories. Two HH-43F's and their crews wrote their names in the books of heros that day. Braving heavy gunfire they saved the lives of 3 crewmembers of the AC-47 that was shot down there. For their efforts the following men have been awarded the Silver Star.

Capt Donald J. Couture of Oak Harbor, Ohio, RCC of first helicopter

Capt Harold A. Solberg of Monroe Wash., RCCP

A2C Albert W. Foster III of Virginia Beach, Va, Pararescue

SSgt David L. Lancaster of Springfield, Ill., Crew Chief

Secondary Helicopter 1/LT AF MACHADO RCC

Capt John B. Kneen of Burlington Vt., RCCP

SSgt David J. Wheeler of Salina, Kan., Pararescue

SSgt Curtis F. Yancy of Odessa, Texas, Crew Chief

Our sincere congratulations on a job well done.

DETACHMENT 7, 38TH AEROSPACE RESCUE & RECOVERY SQUADRON
AEROSPACE RESCUE & RECOVERY SERVICE (MAG)
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96337

EDITOR, AIR FORCE & SPACE DIGEST
AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION
1750 PENNA. AVE. N. W.
WASHINGTON, D.C., 20006

19 October 1966

DEAR SIR:

We enjoyed your June issue very much, especially articles on the air rescue portion of the Vietnam Symposium by Captain Bruce C. Hepp on page 63, and "The Fall of A Shau" by Kenneth Sams, 7th Air Force Historian.

May we make a small correction on the latter please. Page 72 mentions a CH-3C picking up the AC-47 survivors. It was actually an HH-43F from this detachment. The CH-3C from the 20th Tactical Helicopter Squadron picked up some of the last personnel to leave the camp itself. We didn't receive our first HH-3E (Rescue version of the CH-3C) until July 1966. The two HH-43F crews received the silver star for their efforts. See page 24, 31 Aug 66 issue of the Air Force Times.

WILLIAM V. D. HICKERSON, MAJOR, USAF
Information Officer

cc. Kenneth Sams
Historian, 7th /

President Lyndon B. Johnson congratulates members of 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Sq

A SHAU MEN
9 MAR 66

Citation.



August 1966 AIR FORCE and SPACE DIGEST

Left to Right: Col Edward Krafka, former CO; Maj Ronald L. Ingraham; President
CMSG Ronald J. Blier; and TSGT Charles T. Walther.

DETACHMENT 7, 38TH AEROSPACE RESCUE & RECOVERY SQUADRON
AEROSPACE RESCUE & RECOVERY SERVICE (JAC)
APO 96337

REPLY TO

ATTN OF: Major Hickerson/6104

19 October 1966

Subject: Correction to 3d ARRGp Newsletter

TO: Hqs 3rd ARRGp, APO 96307

1. We enjoyed the publicity in the July issue (Vol 1, No. 2) on former members of our detachment who wrote history at the special forces camp at A Shau, on 9 March 1966. We would like to point out the error in the name of the camp which you erroneously list as "As Han."
2. More than this, though, we would like to point out the omission of the Rescue Crew Commander of the secondary helicopter, 1st Lt Arthur F. Machado. Fifty lashes with a wet noodle.

WILLIAM V. D. HICKERSON, Major, USAF
Information Officer

1. Hickerson

TSGT Resos



Silver Stars Go to Crewmen at DaNang for Rescue in Red Sector

DA NANG AB, Vietnam—Eight crewmen from the rescue helicopters of Det. 7, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Sq. have been awarded the Silver Star for rescuing three survivors of a downed AC-47 gunship in VC-held territory.

The primary copter, with Capt. Donald V. Couture and Harold A. Soldberg at the controls and SSgt David L. Lancaster and A2C in the crew, rescued the three surviving members of the downed aircraft.

The secondary copter landed and tried to find the other members of the crew until it became apparent that they had been killed by the VC. Crewmembers are Lt. Arthur F. Machado, Capt. John B. Kneen and SSgts Crutis F. Yaney and David S. Wheeler.

Successful rescue of three aircrewmembers of AC-47 under fire at A Shau, Republic of Vietnam 9 March 1966. HH-43F

Low Bird

P. Capt. D. V. Couture

C.P. Capt. H. A. Solberg

RS ~~H.M.~~ A2C A. W. Foster III

HM ~~R.S.~~ SSGT D. L. Lancaster

High Bird

P. 1st Lt A. F. Machado

C.P. Capt. J. B. Kneen

H.M. SSGT. C. F. Yancy

R.S. SSGT. D. S. Wheeler

AEROSPACE RESCUE and RECOVERY SERVICE

NEWSLETTER

15 August 1966

Office of Information

SILVER STARS FOR HEROISM. Eight members of Det 7, 38th ARRSq, have been awarded the Silver Star for "extraordinary heroism" in rescuing three survivors of an AC-47 gunship downed by enemy fire. The rescue took place on 9 March, near the A Shau Special Forces Camp. The Da Nang RCC was notified that the armed version of the C-47 transport had been shot down, and within minutes, two rescue crews were on their way. Arriving at the valley leading to the crash site, they found the weather extremely bad and Viet Cong troops heavily concentrated in the area. Both helicopters dropped to below tree top level to take advantage of tree cover and the element of surprise. The primary crew with Captains Donald V. Couture and Harold A. Soldberg at the controls raced to the embankment above the aircraft and hovered, their front wheels touching the side of a slope and their rear wheels in the air. Three crewmen raced from the wreck under a hail of fire and dived into the rear section of the Huskie. The chopper lifted off, and immediately the second, piloted by Lt Arthur F. Machado and Captain John B. Kneen, moved in to pick up the rest of the crew. When no one emerged from the wreck, flight mechanic SSgt F. Yaney and pararescue-man SSgt David S. Wheeler leaped from the waiting helio and darted into the AC-47. There they found two crewmen who had been killed by enemy fire. While the rescuemen searched for the last missing crewman, the survivors in the lead chopper told the secondary pilot that the AC-47 co-pilot, in trying to blast open an escape route, had charged the enemy's fire; he was missing and presumed dead. Hearing this, the secondary Huskie pilot lifted his bird into the air to draw the attention of the rescuemen inside the wreck. They saw the warning and attempted to return to the Huskie, but were caught in a hail of machine gun fire and pinned down. An A-1E pilot, seeing their plight, dived on the source of enemy fire. His strafing pass, less than 30 yards away, allowed the two rescuemen to complete their dash to the waiting chopper,
