

1969

Information published below is in most cases raw data excerpted from primary sources. In a few cases it has been refined into a draft story. It is presented here for critical review. Are the facts correct? Are names spelled correctly? Do you have information on missions missing from this rough outline? Do you have a photo or primary source material related to something provided in the outline. E-mail me with information to update this information. Rest assured that your inputs will be seriously considered. I am striving for accuracy above all else.

Email to rlapointe@gci.net

Shortly after President Nixon took office in January 1969, the "Vietnamization" program was accelerated. Vietnamization was the training and equipping of South Vietnamese forces to fight their own war so the U.S. could withdraw its forces as had been planned since 1962. The first U.S. troops departed in July and by the end of the year, 69,000 had been withdrawn.

When President Johnson ordered the complete bombing halt of North Vietnam in October 1968, it was with the understanding that USAF reconnaissance aircraft would continue to fly over the country. However, North Vietnam fired on some of these planes, so President Nixon ordered several retaliatory strikes against air defense sites. During the rainy season which began in May, North Vietnam began stockpiling supplies and equipment inside its border with Laos, and it even built an oil pipeline into the panhandle. These supplies were shipped to North Vietnam either by rail from China or by sea from China or the Soviet Union through its ocean ports, primarily Haiphong. With the bombing halt in effect, North Vietnam could do as it wished without fear of attack.

On March 23, 1969, the Laotian Army launched a large attack against the Communists, supported by its own air units and the USAF. In June, the enemy launched an attack of its own and gained ground, but in August, Laotian forces attacked again and regained what had been lost. In all these operations, the USAF flew hundreds of "Barrel Roll" missions; however, many were canceled because of poor weather.

For years, the enemy had lived in Cambodia, crossing the border for attacks into South Vietnam and then fleeing back across the border to safety. And for years, U.S. and South Vietnamese military experts (including ex-President Eisenhower) had called upon President Johnson to permit attacks on the enemy in these sanctuaries. When the enemy launched another nationwide offensive on February 23, 1969, President Nixon decided North Vietnam had no intentions of accepting a peace. He ordered a secret two month bombing offensive by B-52's on the Cambodian sanctuaries used by the NVA.

January 1969

12 Jan 69

Bison SAR. F-105 (Major Thompson) downed in Laos. Rescued by H-3 Jolly crewed by: LtCol Brown AC, Captain Gibson CP, TSgt Casey FE, A1C Samuelson PJ

17 Jan 69

Stormy 02B SAR. F4 shot down near Tchepone, Laos

18 Jan 69

Sandy 02 SAR picked up by 40th ARRS. JG 67 shot down. Covey 285 SAR picked up by 37th ARRS.

Stormy 2B SAR - Near Tchepone, Laos. A Phantom F-4C is hit by Anti-Aircraft-Artillery (AAA) and the two crewmembers eject. A Sandy A-1E providing close air cover to protect them is also shot down and he too ejects. HH-53 Super Jolly Green crews from the 40th ARRS, Udorn RTAB scramble. Pararescuemen Thomas R. Pope and Donald C. "Surfer" Johnson are aboard Jolly Green 67. They begin as high-bird flying at 10,000 feet watching the exploding AAA below them. Low bird picks up one F-4 pilot and through him learns of the probable demise of the other. Low bird speeds off to DaNang Air Base, Vietnam to deliver him to the hospital. Jolly Green 67 just recently air refueled now becomes low bird in case the Sandy pilot is located.

The call comes and '67 begins the descent to make the pickup. Sandy's provide close air support below them until they reach five hundred feet and then they are on their own. They first make visual contact with his parachute and as they approach, the pilot uncovers himself from the green and brown panels of his parachute where he has been hiding, demonstrating he is alive. Through the flip of a coin, Johnson is #1 PJ, meaning he is designated to ride the hoist and recover the survivor if necessary. Pope is stationed in the rear of the aircraft at the #3 mini-gun position on the tail ramp, a fully exposed and vulnerable position. Jolly Green 67 rotates into a hover over the waiting Sandy driver. The Sandy pilot does not need assistance, so Johnson positions himself at the #2 mini-gun on the port (left) side returning fire as the NVA troops open up their flak trap, riddling '67 with small arms rounds. Tom is in the rear returning fire at 3000 rounds per minute, swinging the mini back and forth trying to protect the ship. Johnson spots a machine gun nest and sprays the area. The helicopter hovers and the flight engineer operates the hoist keeping a running commentary while bringing the survivor onboard. Once on board the grateful Sandy pilot gets out of the doorway and the flight engineer swings the #1 mini-gun into place on the right-hand side. Jolly '67 turns 180 degrees and begins their escape. But as they pull away enemy gunners find their mark. The following, in his own words, is Johnson's recollection of what happened next: ... Tommy's been hit! I yelled into the crew intercom. "I threw off my helmet, ran the length of my 'monkey strap' safety harness until it jerked me to a stop. I unhooked the thing and continued to rush to the rear of the aircraft. Hydraulic fluid gushed streams of hot, viscous, pink fluid everywhere. Tom was drenched and slipping out and over the tail ramp edge towards a three hundred foot fall; his monkey strap cut in two. I reached to save him, slid on the slick, greased flooring, started to follow him into the void outside the helicopter. Desperately I grabbed Tom with my right hand while flailing, stretched with my other arm and grabbed the horizontal retainer strap used to cordon off the rear

section of the A/C when the ramp was in firing position; it prevented both of us from falling to our deaths. Pulling Tom back into the interior of the helicopter, I have a vivid memory of him using both of his legs to help motivate us into relative safety. Nothing on the helicopter worked, PERIOD! Though I was not aware, a titanic struggle by our two pilots was being waged to keep the aircraft in flight. They valiantly fought the unresponsive controls of the ship to maintain steady flight, yet we roller coasted. I remained in the rear of the disabled helicopter with my seriously wounded friend. Frantically, I applied a battlefield dressing; using the tails of the rectangular bandage as a makeshift tourniquet, my survival knife as a turnkey, I succeed in reducing the spurting of his arteries. I ran to our medical kit, got a legitimate field tourniquet and secured it so tight around Tom's leg, above his knee, I could hear his screams even into tonight's nightmares. We were still taking ground fire. Purdue, our flight mechanic, fired back with the only manned mini; the Sandy Man we had just rescued came to help me. Then we heard the mechanic scream, 'We're gonna crash!' "Jeez' we sure did! "Prior to a rescue attempt, when a Jolly was ready to descend for a pickup, the pilots usually topped off the main internal fuel tanks from the exterior reserves located on the sponsons of the helicopter amid-ship, then jettisoned the external tanks. This was done to add maneuverability and speed to the helicopter. For some reason, a broken servo mechanism, bad indicator light, or simply not enough time, we didn't release the exterior fuel cells; that saves the whole crew of Jolly Green 67. You see, when we impacted the earth on a downhill slope, our aircraft lurched onto its left side. The helicopter's rotor head lunged towards the ground and except for the external tank acting as an outrigger on a canoe, the helicopter would've dismembered the aircraft, the crew, everything, if the rotor blades beat the ground and disintegrated. One of my most persistent memories was with Tom Pope on top of me, the Sandy Man, trying his best, retained a grip of the wounded crewmember, as we heaved onto the left external fuel tank. I looked back out past the ramp area and saw a slithering track left by the gas container acting as our stabilizer. We bounced back down level, jittered our way through the clearing, decreasing speed until, of course, the jungle loomed ahead and we rammed into it. Well, we stopped. That was the good news; bad news, we were still taking ground fire. A very, very bad sign. "Sometimes it was good, but not intentionally so, that we as Air Rescue really didn't know about the ground situation when we went to do a pickup. This was one of those times. Later, after the incident, I found out we had been the violently invited guests of somewhere around 10,000 armed troops. Our escort Sandy's immediately formed a 'circle of wagons' to stave off the attack. The Sandy's expended tons of explosives keeping our inhospitable host at bay.

"The Sandy Man helped me place Tom onto our field litter and with him up front and with me at the rear, we grabbed the litter's hand grips and humped the stretcher towards the exit and the rest of the crew. When we got to the others, the pilots were attempting to get the secret documents, carried in our weapons locker, and take them with us. I pointedly told them to 'get the hell out of here!' "I knew we needed perimeter security fast. We rallied under the shattered rear empennage of our shot up and shot down helicopter. The unique aspect about this entire episode was that we survived with only one man injured. All Jolly's prior to us, who had taken a 37mm AAA round in the chopper, blew up a la Locker. We had come down in one large and several smaller

pieces. The round detonated at the last main structural cross member of the helicopter. If it had been right or left of that particular spot by as few inches as six, the explosion probably would've cut the tail section off. As it was, when we were in the air the tail rotor performed lazy figure eights, which were useless to our flight progress. It was also a fact we had the minimum forward air speed, about 60 MPH, to maintain relative flight. As all 'rotor-heads' know, no tail rotor, no-go no-where but spinning uncontrollably downward until smash. If the 37mm blast had been a few feet lower or slower in momentum, it would've been another Jolly Green "by the grace of the gods go I" story. And, of course, if the AAA round had bludgeoned a few feet higher, Tom Pope would have lost his head in the heat of battle. As the 'luck of that coin predetermined,' he was alive, helmet blown off and shot up with shrapnel, bleeding from multitudinous wounds (although his flak vest protected his vital organs) as well as his amputated leg, and going towards irreversible shock rapidly.

"So, there we were, under the tattered remnants of a flying machine, all six of us waiting for something to happen. I wasn't for sticking around allowing the Communist's greeting committee to welcome us with a block party serving hot fire and lead poisoning. My M-16 was, of course, locked and loaded. I turned to Major Darghty and said we had to get out of there. He replied rescue was on its way. I leaned over Tom and reassured him, 'Tom, its alright, but we may have to make a run for it! Can you hold on?' The pallor of his face loomed distressfully close to shock, as I asked, 'Where's your kit, we're going to need the extra ammo and grenades.' "I ran into the dead Jolly trying to locate those consequential pounds of explosives amid the mess and trash of our catastrophic circumstances. "Then I ran back to Tom and said, 'I can't find your kit.' He replied, 'Well, you're going to have to do the job with yours.' We both knew what he meant: It was a time of desperation. Tom Pope and I, along with a few other of the younger PJ's had made a decision and had asked those others of the same mind to abide by it, however disgusting the action may seem. We were dedicated to not being captured! The RECONDO course had disclosed in graphic, descriptive terms, the gruesome, grotesque and thoroughly nauseating facts of how and what kind of torture would be in store for those caught by the NVA; elite special operations personnel would fair worse. The instructors at the Nha Trang RSVN school spared no detail into the subject. And those of us who had listened realized that if caught, we were charred, eviscerated meat. So, deny the enemy! Deny him the serenade of our screams; deny him our spasms of agony; deny him the propaganda possibilities; deny him information; deny him the only way possible. Beats the hell out of slow cooking, head downwards, body bound to a tree spread eagle over a barbecue for three days. Major Darghty, our pilot, interrupted us as I got morphine out to inject Tom, easing his pain. I still considered running with him on my back. The officer told us our rescue Jolly was inbound.

Marty Fredric Donohue and Carl W. Oliver, flew through that flak to pick us up. Now, whether he had direct permission or instinctively perceived the only course available, The Man flew his Jolly through all the stuff that blew us out of the sky and landed his aircraft within a few feet of ours; tail ramp pointed up slope, the likely avenue of ambush. Our three pilots and the flight engineer immediately ran for the door and interior safety of the rescue Jolly, leaving Tom and I waiting for my best friend Tommy

W. Meyer. He came out of their Jolly on the run with Dan E. Galde, the other PJ, alongside. They lifted Tom Pope's stretcher and returned to the waiting Jolly. Afforded cover from the right external fuel tank, I protected the crew door as Tom Pope was placed in. Tommy Meyer screamed over the deafening combination of exploding ordinance and screeching turbines to get in. I lunged for the door, Tommy grasped my shoulder pulling me inwards as the Jolly accelerated into flight. Then a machine gun went off. "I was kneeling down on the floor of the Jolly preparing to start intravenous therapy after handing Tommy Meyer the narcotic kit to give Tom Pope more morphine to ease his misery. The roaring, agonizing howl of a machine gun sent my heart racing in fright, attempting to escape the overcrowded condition of fear in my body; my internal thoughts gasped, 'My God, shot down again.!'"

"But it was Dan Galde firing his mini-gun. Three NVA, who'd followed the external tank's slither of Jolly Green 67 to our position, were preparing to disable another Jolly when Dan fired on them. We increased our altitude, ground fire concentrated on us as the Sandy's tried to prevent another Jolly shot down. 12.7mm, 23mm 37mm, and 57mm anti-aircraft artillery opened on us; small arms automatic rifle fire spewed past us peppering the sky around us with their destructive fireworks, gray and black shrouds and green tracers. The valley of Muang Xepon Laos receded as we climbed to a safer altitude, and our Jolly pilot turned us towards Thailand and the nearest hospital, NKP. "Of course, that's not the end of the events of 18 January 1969.

"When we arrived at 'Naked Fanny,' I broke down, physically and psychologically drained, emotionally spent. An Air Force doctor gave me the once-over and allowed me, after I asked, to see Tom Pope. "I walked down a puke green colored hospital corridor, unsure of what I'd find through the ominous swinging doors at the end. I walked hesitantly. I looked through the glass window set in the door, frightened, fearing the worst. I saw a white sheeted figure, still, unmoving. My heart stuttered; my mind reeled. ... He's dead.' "I couldn't stand the agitation in my soul, yet, I opened the door, walked to the hospital gurney on which he lay, placed my hand on his shoulder and gently shook him. "'Tom?' I inquired, looking with hope and fear, the amalgam of desperation, at my friend and fellow PJ. My hand was shaking, quivery like a cornered little animal. His eyes opened, glazed, yet cognitive, and he smiled. "'How are you?' he replied, his words thick with narcotic stupor. "'Not bad considering what we've just been through,' I confided, attempting to keep in check the full feeling of anguish. ... Hey,' Tom said, 'you want a laugh?' ... Yes,' I replied, trying to remain lighthearted amid the disagreeable fact of his several and severe injuries. "Tom continued. 'Two doctors came and examined my leg..., ' his words difficult and slow, his pronunciation complicated by his uncoordinated tongue and cottoned mouth. "'You know one of them turned to the other exclaiming, 'Look at that (pointing to the damaged leg) it must've been a real bad medic to have to use two tourniquets on this guy.' "Tom, incensed, verbally landed his punch while staring down the two presumptuous REMFS. "'I'm alive, aren't I?' "The doctors, taken aback by his statement, left in embarrassed silence. "'Listen, D.C. 'Surfer' Johnson, you did good work. Always Remember That! I'm alive aren't I?' "'Yea, Tom, you are. Thanks.' "He faded off to rest before his operation as I turned to exit and left him passing into euphoria. "Our remaining team returned to Udom late that night. Tom

would also return. He got his last ride in a HH-53B Super Jolly Green Giant during his convalescence before he left for stateside. His camouflaged right arm raised in a salute with his fingers in a 'V' sign to the Jolly's, would become the signature of Pararescue tenacity. Tom Pope departed; I stayed.

"It was twenty-five years later that I found out who the Sandy Man was. Oh! Not just any hot shot, driving those beautiful flying machines called affectionately, 'Sandy's,' A-1 Douglas Skyraiders, whose motto was, 'You've been had by a Sandy Spad.' No! Tom Pope and I and our Jolly crews saved the Commander of the 602nd Special Operations Squadron, Lieutenant Colonel Lurie Morris."

Source = D.C. Johnson story

(Authors' Note: During thirteen months in Southeast Asia, Sergeant Pope flies 142 combat missions and compiles more than 324 combat flying hours in the '53. He is personally responsible for saving four U.S. aircrew members and garnered the DFC, Bronze Star, Air Medal, and the Purple Heart. *Use photo Maples folder & 50 yrs*

19 Jan 69

Covey 264 SAR. 40 ARRS HH-53 picked up survivor. Sandies used CBU-19 gas. Jolly crews got a pretty good whiff of it during pickup.

20 Jan 69

Richard M Nixon sworn in as President of the United States. He campaigned against the way President Johnson ran the Vietnam War and promised to end the war with honor. He was aware that America was tired of this war and that every week 300 Americans died in it. Vietnam had become Americas longest war and the new president knew that he could not ask his fellow Americans to enlarge the war for a promise of victory. Inaugural address "We are caught in war, wanting peace. We are torn by division wanting unity....Let us take as our goal; where peace is unknown, make it welcome; where peace is fragile, make it strong; where peace is temporary, make it permanent. After a period of confrontation, we are entering an era of negotiation. Let all nations know that during this administration our lines of communication will be open. America liked what it heard from their new leader. But if the North Vietnamese thought that he was willing go get peace at any price, they were to soon find out that Nixon had no intention of allowing them to conquer South Vietnam on his watch.

Among his first moves in office was to order a complete review of the entire Vietnam situation. He wanted an unvarnished report with all options considered; from outright surrender by the United States to the complete destruction of North Vietnam. He gave this project to his national security advisor, Henry Kissenger.

Eight years earlier, President John F Kennedy was given was given a report with four reasons that justified war in Vietnam. The reasons were containing communism, retaining influence in SEA, maintaining international credibility, and countering "wars of

national liberation.”

Summons of the Trumpet p216 locate primary source

22 Jan 69

Start of a new interdiction concept using 16 F-4 aircraft striking selected road segments with road cutting ordnance.

23 Jan 69

Total USAF aircraft losses exceed 1,500

24 Jan 69

Honda 03 A&B SAR. Rescued by HH-53B crewed by: Major Eagan AC, Captain Gibson CP, MSgt Krum FE, TSgt Dolford Widener PJ, A1C Douglas Horka PJ

28 Jan 69

Wolf 02 A&B SAR. (37 ARRS?) F-4 downed. Rescued by HH-53B Jolly 36 crewed by: LtCol Brown AC, Captain Lintner CP, MSgt Krum FE, TSgt Dolford Widener PJ, A1C Harris PJ

February

12 Feb 69

Bien Hoa AB, RVN. Detachment 6, 38th ARRS pararescueman Dave Rhody is a crewmember on an HH43 Pedro sent to assist in the recovery of three injured members of a U.S. Army Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol team (LRRP), twenty-two miles northwest of Bien Hoa City. When the helicopter arrives on-scene, it comes under enemy automatic weapons fire. The helicopter takes twenty-four hits and is forced to return to the base for repairs. Another HH-43 is exchanged, and the crew heads back to the fight. In the interim, an Army AH-1 Cobra helicopter gunship crew has moved in to clear the area, and an eight-man quick-reaction team forms a forty-yard protective perimeter around the LRRPS. An additional HH-43 from Det. 6 with PJ Terry Wells on board, is launched. Meanwhile, Sergeant Rhody is lowered into the area. While raising the first two litter patients, sporadic ground fire erupts, and he instructs the pilot to pull out of the area to avoid damage to this aircraft. Rhody remains behind for an hour to provide protection for the remaining wounded man. When enemy opposition has been reduced, the HH-43 returns to extract the two men. On its way out, it receives light ground fire, but continues on to Lai Khe where the wounded are given medical attention. The HH-43 that Wells is on receives extensive battle damage. Rhody escapes unharmed on this hazardous mission and is later awarded the Silver Star.

Source = *Pararescue 50 years*

13 Feb 69

Start of KEEPOUT Operations in western III Corps, using special ordnance dropped on the main enemy LOCs along the Cambodian Border and extending toward Saigon.

14 Feb 69

3rd ARRGp celebrated its 25th anniversary on Valentines Day.

Det 8 38 ARRSq Cam Ranh Bay scrambled an HH-43B for an incoming F-4C that had battle damage and had declared an emergency. It's right main landing gear would not come down. Upon landing, the right main fuel tank of the F-4 ruptured and the aircraft slid off the runway and caught fire. The Pedro crew deployed its FSK, two firefighters and a PJ. The HH-43 then established a hover over the F-4 which kept the flames from the fire from becoming very high. The Pedro fireman laid down foam to create a path to the F-4 cockpit . There they and the PJ assisted the two F-4 crewmembers out of the aircraft. The base fire trucks arrived as the Pedro crewmen were leading the pilots out of the fire. Base firefighters put out the remaining fire. The Pedro crew was flown by pilot LtCol Flavious Drake, copilot Capt Horace Holland, firefighters SSgt Larry Cunningham and Sgt Lynn Pilsbury and PJ TSgt Joseph Fernandez.



15 Feb 69

SAR on downed F-4 pilot in the enemy infested A Shau Valley, in SVN near the Laos border. CBU-19 tear gas used. Jolly picked up pilot. *Add p95-96#7*

Pintail SAR. F-4 (Lt Breault) downed in Laos. Rescued by HH-53B Jolly 37 crewed by: Captain Harwood AC, Captain Gibson CP, SSgt Anderson FE, Sgt Caffall PJ, A1C Barry Hebert PJ

15 Feb 69

Daily bombing of all interdiction points slowly phased out. Instead, packages of mine-type munitions were placed at key choke points on LOCs which were supporting heavy traffic.

18 Feb 69

SERGEANT MICHAEL E. FISH. On 18 February 1969, Detachment 11, 38th ARRS, Tuy Hoa AB, RVN, is notified a U.S. Army UH-1 helicopter has crashed twenty-five miles southwest of the base. Six people are involved; five people are trapped inside. Pedro 05, an HH-43, launches immediately with Sergeant Mike Fish onboard. At the scene, Fish and a fireman are lowered from a one hundred foot hover to the ground. The area is "hot," a fact attested to by gunfire. Overhead, an Army helicopter gunship provides air cover. Sergeant Fish and the firefighter are able to free three personnel immediately, who are quickly hoisted aboard Pedro. Because of the seriousness of their injuries, Pedro 05 transports them to a clearing five miles away where they are transferred to an awaiting Army helicopter. Pedro 05 then returns to base due to low fuel. Meanwhile, another Army helicopter swoops in to pick up a deceased member and another survivor. Pedro 24 arrives shortly before dark and hoists the firefighter aboard. Sergeant Fish refuses to leave the remaining survivor still trapped in the tangled wreckage. During the night Fish faced repeated attacks by Viet Cong forces trying to kill or capture Fish and the survivor. The next day at dawn, both HH-43 helicopters return and are again greeted by ground fire. Pedro 05 lowers its flight engineer and firefighter equipped with crash access equipment. Within fifteen minutes, the trapped survivor is freed, and Pedro 05 hoists him, the flight engineer, and firefighter aboard. An Army UH-1 recovers Fish and a deceased U.S. Army ground team member, a casualty of the night's fire fights. *Source = 50 years*

HH-53C's arrived at Udorn – have 7 birds

22Feb69 F-4 SAR Laos

The Raven watched the first fighter enter its run and saw the bombs drop, but just as the Phantom was beginning to pull off it started to come apart. It was incomprehensible. There had been no ground fire, or even reports of anti-aircraft guns capable of taking a jet out of the sky at 3,500 feet, but the plane had turned into a ball of smoke.

Inside the cockpit of the F-4, Mike Heenan, the co-pilot, had got on the stick the moment he sensed something was wrong. He heard the pilot grunt, as if he were also fighting to get the aircraft under control. They were diving fast, but an aerodynamic nose rise made it seem as if the plane might be recovering. Not until they were very low did it become apparent that the F4 was going to dive straight into the ground.

At the same moment that Heenan went for the handles to eject, he heard the pilot cry, "Get out, Mike—get out!" In the split second between hearing his colleague call to him and being blown out of the plane, Heenan accepted his death. "I know I was going to die. It was a very warm feeling—it surprised me how comfortable it was—how easy it was to accept."

Heenan blacked out on ejection, and when he came around he was hanging from his parachute, which had caught in a tree. He had smashed through its branches and slammed into

the trunk and was bleeding profusely. A small, sharp branch stuck through one of his hands like a dagger, and his helmet had been ripped off, laying bare a part of his skull, but he felt no pain. He hung helplessly from the tree, badly confused and in shock, while around him everything seemed deathly quiet. "I could not believe I was alive!"

A moment of panic followed. He fired his flares and began to shout for help into the hand-held survival radio. Papa Fox identified over the air as Raven 44, came up on the radio and

told the downed pilot to keep calm—and to get to the ground. Heenan unbuckled himself from the parachute and allowed himself to fall, hitting the ground hard at an awkward angle and spraining his ankle so badly he thought he had broken it. He felt swallowed by the silence. The chute was draped over the tree like a tent, a beacon that stood out in a plain mostly made up of bushes and dotted with only a few tall the chute, but looked back to see that he was leaving a clear trail not only of crushed grass, but of blood as well. He began to worry excessively that the smell of blood would attract tigers. He felt terrible thirsty and searched for his water bottle, but it had fallen from the pocket of his flight suit on ejection. Most of all he was scared.

Papa Fox came back on the radio. According to all the training manuals, a pilot was supposed to keep his composure, reserve his flares, and observe correct radio procedures. Papa Fox knew the reality was different, and remembered that the first thing he had done when shot down was to run wildly into the forest.

He explained patiently that a fully fledged search and rescue (SAR) operation was going to take time to mount, but they would have him out soon enough. He urged Heenan to move in a northeasterly direction to a better pick up spot. "I had no clue which way northeast was," Heenan said. "I had a compass in the top left-hand pocket of my survival vest, but I had forgotten it was there. Rather than call me a dumb shit, Raven 44 flew over to show me the direction." He scrambled three hundred yards to the northeast and backed into a bush, painstakingly covering himself with foliage.

There were Jolly Greens - HH-3E super rescue helicopters - on alert only twenty-two miles from where the Phantom had disintegrated, which meant Heenan could have been picked up within ten minutes of the crash. But cumbersome Air Force procedures dictated that the choppers could not take off until A-1 Skyraiders had been scrambled from Nakhon Phanom, in Thailand, and successfully suppressed all ground fire in the area. When the A-1s did arrive, one almost flew straight into Papa Fox, missing him by less than a hundred feet.

It had been quiet for the first forty-five minutes that Heenan was on the ground. There were no enemy in the near vicinity and he heard no ground fire, but by the time the A-1s arrived the North Vietnamese had spotted the chute in the tree. A few scattered shots began to be fired, slowly building to a crescendo of automatic-weapons fire. From his position on the ground the most visible thing to Heenan was Raven 44, endlessly crisscrossing the sky above him, checking to see if it was safe for the Jolly Green to land.

Although Heenan could not see the enemy, he heard them yelling to one another - something which scared him much more than the shooting. He was armed with a .38 Combat Masterpiece revolver, but with only one hand in use he was forced to alternate between holding the weapon and the radio. Backed into the bush, he remained frozen, afraid to move lest the rustling leaves attracted attention. The sound of enemy voices

came from behind him. "The worst fear of all was that I could not see death approaching me."

The enemy were closing in, firing at the airplanes above them as they moved. The Jolly Green came in low to attempt a pickup. Heenan realized he had been blacking out intermittently through loss of blood when, without hearing the chopper's approach, he saw it was right beside him. A crew member was sitting with the rear ramp down, firing both miniguns. "He was putting out a sheet of flame six feet long. It was really beautiful."

But the Jolly Green had not seen him, and when the chopper began to take heavy ground fire it moved off. The Skyraiders made a pass and laid down smoke to give the Jolly Green cover for a second rescue attempt, but the drop had been misjudged and the smoke was put directly on top of Heenan, screening him from sight. The rescue mission was rapidly degenerating into a shambles.

Heenan had now been on the ground for almost two hours, and continuous bleeding meant he was beginning to black out for longer and longer periods of time. Unable to see anything through the smoke, and with enemy fire coming closer by the moment as they tightened the circle around him, he began to wonder if the recovery had been abandoned. He called Papa Fox: "How long do you think it's going to be?" "Be good," Papa Fox told him. "We're coming to get you, don't you worry about it."

In fact, Papa Fox was running out of patience himself with the way things were being run. According to the regulations he was obliged to give up control of the SAR the moment the lead Skyraider arrived on station, but the operation had degenerated into a frenzied muddle. If something was not done, Heenan would be dead within half an hour. Relying on force of personality over rank or regulations, Papa Fox resumed command of the rescue.

He called the Jolly Green on the radio. "Get on my ass, I'll take you down there—let's get the son of a bitch." Cranking down the flaps of the O-1 and flying as slowly as possible without stalling, he led the chopper through the smoke to where Heenan was hidden. The Jolly Green hovered over the bush, while a crew member was lowered on a hoist.

Heenan scrambled toward him, and together they were winched up into the helicopter. The moment Heenan was on the hoist he felt his rescuer give him a powerful hug and was deeply affected. At that moment a strong human embrace was exactly what he needed, although in reality the airman was merely claspng him tight while he aimed an M-16 at the enemy who had come running from the cover of nearby bushes. The airman fired two full magazines of ammo before the men were pulled into the chopper.

Later the Jolly Green crew visited Heenan in the hospital at Udorn, and he thanked them for saving his life. Papa Fox arrived and Heenan thanked him for his extraordinary patience. He knew that Raven 44 had put himself "at grave personal risk" coming in low to lead the Jolly Green through the weeds to pick him up. He knew that if Raven 44 had not been unorthodox and taken over the mission, he would never have been picked up.

Note: AC & PJ lowered to ground awarded Silver Star
Christopher Robbins, The Ravens – Pilots of the Secret War in Laos, (Bangkok: Asia Books, 2000), p. 179-182

23 Feb 69

Start of a new enemy offensive, the Fourth Offensive, with widespread attacks by fire and limited ground probes

26 Feb 69

The major enemy ground assault of the Fourth Offensive took place at Bien Hoa, a few kilometers from the air base, while attacks by fire and limited ground probes continued through out RVN. The enemy was unwilling or unable to mount actions on the scale of the three previous offensives but carried out a series of high points until early April.

28 Feb 69

Nail 77 SAR. O-2 photographer SMSgt Morrell downed in Laos. Rescued by HH-3E Jolly crewed by:

Major Silver AC, Captain Wheate CP, Sgt Hunt FE, A1C Leland Sorenson PJ. HH-53's at NKP and Udorn not mission capable due to maintenance. Nitnoy's recover survivor.

March 1969

3 – 4 Mar 69

USAF aircraft destroyed Soviet built PT-76 tanks attacking the Ben Het CIDG camp in western II Corps

18 Mar 69

"Menu" operations begin. B-52s, operating under "special security and reporting procedures," bomb North Vietnamese and Viet Cong sanctuaries in Cambodia. Between March 18, 1969, and May 20, 1970, the B-52s fly 4,308 sorties in Cambodia.

26 Mar 69

Hobo SAR. A-1 (Captain Gilmore) downed in Laos. Rescued by HH-53B Jolly 17 crewed by: Major Smith AC, Captain Wheate CP, Sgt Jordan FE, TSgt Dolford Widener PJ, A1C Robert Sully PJ

Hobo 63 SAR. A-1 (Lt Fass) downed in Laos. Rescued by HH-53B Jolly 17 crewed by: Major Smith AC, Captain Wheate CP, Sgt Jordan FE, A1C Grady Allen PJ, A1C Donald Faber PJ

29 Mar 69

American deaths in SEA exceeded the Korean toll 33,642 as compared with 33,629

April 1969

American combat death toll in Vietnam has passed that of the Korean War.

3 Apr 69

Cupcake SAR (Lt Ricci) downed in Laos. Rescue by H-3 Jolly 36 crewed by: Major Smith AC, Captain Nash CP, Sgt Brown FE, A1C Samuelson PJ

Cupcake SAR (LtCmdr Reddin) downed in Laos. Rescued by HH-53 Jolly 19 crewed by: Captain Carty AC, Captain Gibson CP, Sgt Burnett FE, A1C Harris PJ, A1C David Davison PJ

6 Apr 69

First light pickup in Steel Tiger. Two HH-53's departed Udorn at 0230. Low bird made both pickups. First CSAR for Capt Reeder & Capt O'Pay

9 Apr 69

JG 79 and JG 76 rescue two Marine pilots. On return home they took 100-150 rounds of 23 or 37mm AAA. One of the Jolly's up north chopped probe off with rotor blades as it disconnected from the tanker. Jolly diverted to CH 113 for emergency landing.

16 Apr 69

Pintail A&B SAR. F-4 (Major Winkels & Captain Anderson) rescued by H-3 Jolly 17, crewed by: Captain Heft AC, Captain Nash CP, Sgt Scot FE, A1C Chalmer Harris PJ

27 Apr 69

A fire at the USMC ammunition supply point at DaNang AB spread rapidly, resulting in high order explosions and fires. The loss in USAF, USMC, and VNAF munitions was calculated at \$25.5 million.

30 Apr 69

The enemy to friendly KIA ratio increased 9.2 to 1, the highest of the war

May 1969

11-14 May 69

VC/NVA initiated another high point in activity with 63 attacks by fire and 64 ground probes

17 May 69

40th ARRS launches on SAR in Steel Tiger, just above Mu Gia Pass. Had voice contact at first. Sent PJ down but pilot had died.

20 May 69

The Paris peace talks begin

June 1969

1 June 1969 marked an extremely nostalgic day when the call sign of Crown was replaced by the call sign King. The JSARC (Joint Search and Rescue Center) at Tan Son Nhut, RVN became Joker vice King and the RCC at Udorn became Jack vice Compress.

source = 39th ARRS History 1Apr-30Jun69

7 Jun 69

President Nixon met with President Thieu at Midway to discuss the war. Withdrawal of 25,000 U.S. troops was ordered from RVN by August 31st. Calling the move a first step, Nixon promises further reductions.

16 June

40 ARRS picks up Kingfish 01, an F-105 pilot. Survivor had serious injuries that required stokes litter pick up.

July 1969

July 1

The Army and Air Force announce that social security numbers will replace serial numbers used for identification since 1918. The Navy and Marine Corps also make the change shortly after.

8 Jul 69

President Nixon announces the first troop withdrawals from South Vietnam. Code named Keystone Eagle, it consisted of 25,000 troops from RVN

15 July 69

Nixon hoped that once Ho Chi Minh perceived that the President was in fact withdrawing American combat troops, the North Vietnamese would become less intransigent at the Paris peace talks. To further his plan, Nixon corresponded directly with Ho on July 15, 1969, and received a reply on August 25. Nixon regarded Ho's reply as a rejection of his peace initiative. In any case, Ho died three days later, on August 28, and the war went on as before. The text of the two letters was not released to the public until November 3 when Nixon made a televised address to the nation announcing the "Vietnamization" program.

PRESIDENT NIXON'S LETTER

July 15, 1969

Dear Mr. President:

I realize that it is difficult to communicate meaningfully across the gulf of four years of war. But precisely because of this gulf, I wanted to take this opportunity to reaffirm in all solemnity my desire to work for a just peace. I deeply believe that the war in Vietnam has gone on too long and delay I bringing it to an end can benefit no one –

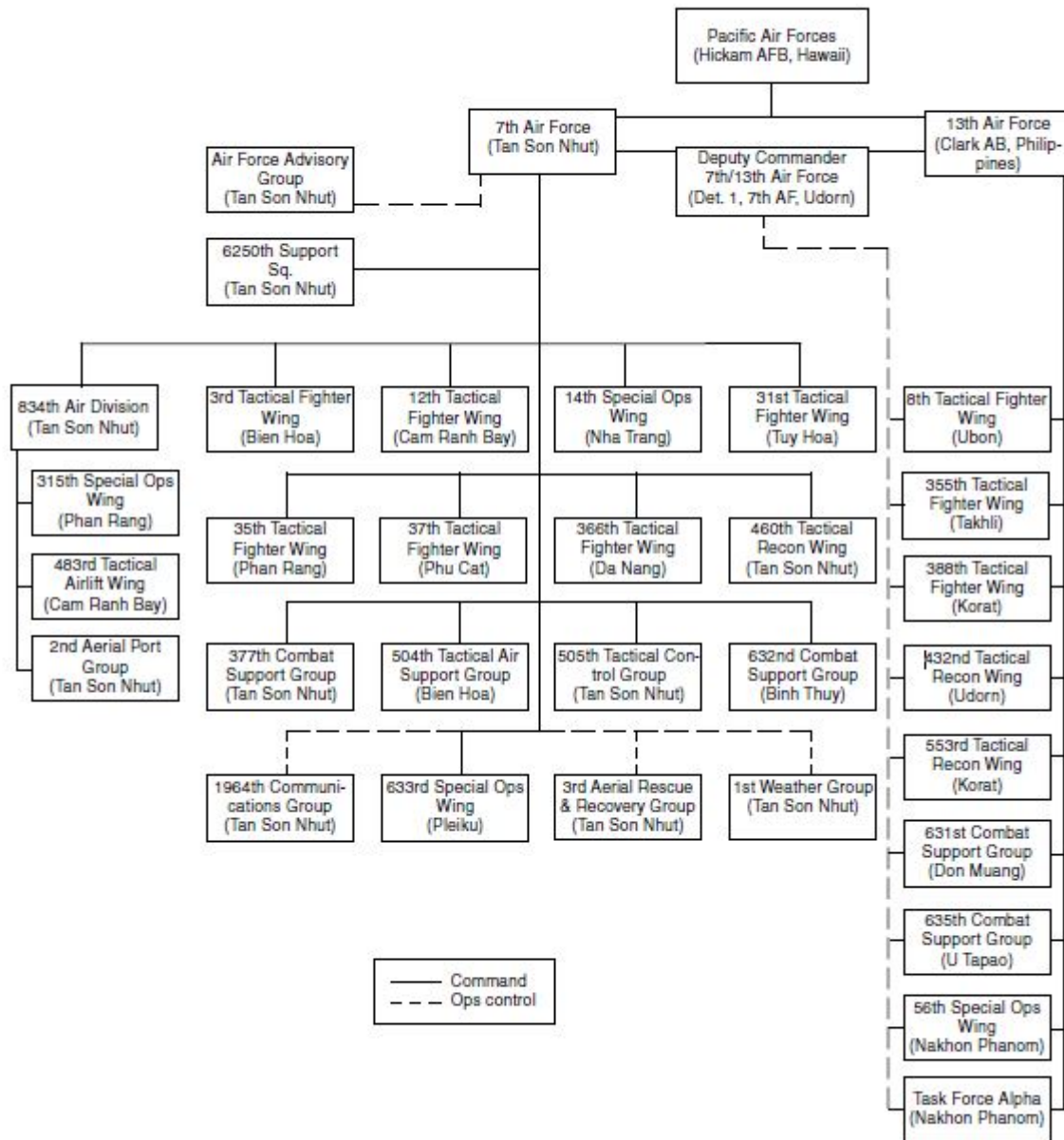
least of all the people of Vietnam. My speech on May 14 laid out a proposal which I believe is fair to all parties. Other proposals have been made which attempt to give the people of South Vietnam an opportunity to choose their own future. These proposals take into account the reasonable conditions of all sides. But we stand ready to discuss other programs as well, specifically the 10-point program of the NLF.

As I have said repeatedly, there is nothing to be gained by waiting. Delay can only increase the dangers and multiply the suffering.

The time has come to move forward at the conference table toward and early resolution of this tragic war. You will find us forthcoming and open-minded in the common effort to bring the blessings of peace to the brave people of Vietnam. Let history record that at this critical juncture, both sides turned their face toward peace rather than toward conflict and war.

7th Air Force and 7th/13th Air Force

July 15, 1969



Source: Carl Berger, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973* (USAF).

19 Jul 69

TECHNICAL SERGEANT HARRY M. COHEN. At Detachment 12, 3 8th ARRS, Utapao AB, Thailand, an HH-43 Huskie is scrambled in response to a bomber emergency during a heavy rainstorm. The crew includes Technical Sergeant Cohen and Staff Sergeant Tommy Miles, pararescuemen/firefighters. The bomber has aborted a heavyweight takeoff and has run off the end of the runway, its forward gear collapsing, and catching the aircraft on fire. The Huskie approaches the nose of the bomber, hovers

momentarily, then proceeds to hover three or four hundred yards from the scene. The crew is unable to get confirmation that the bomber's tail-gunner cleared the wreckage so they return to the scene. They make a fly-by, clockwise around the tail of the bomber at about 200 feet, and are westbound at approximately 500 to 600 feet from the bomber when the bombs explode. Shrapnel and debris tear the rotor system from the helicopter and it crashes, killing the pilot and Sergeant Cohen. Miraculously, Tommy Miles survives with massive life-threatening injuries, but after extensive surgery he returns to pararescue duty and eventually retires after a long and successful career. *Source = 50 years*

20 Jul 69

Four days after liftoff from Cape Kennedy in the Apollo 11 spacecraft, astronaut Neil Armstrong becomes the first man to walk on the moon.

22 Jul 69

40th ARRS first light SAR in Steel Tiger north of CH72. Two Marine pilots picked up and returned to CH89. Jolly piloted by Major Jones and Capt McCullough. This was Captain McCullough's first CSAR. Jolly made the pickup with only one tip tank jettisoned and also had a hoist malfunction. One of the pilots had no radio – he attracted attention with flares.

Arc Light sorties were reduced from 1,800 to 1,600 per month

25 Jul 69

Nixon speech at Guam announces Vietnamization of the war. "We shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense." Vietnamization was a program to strengthen the ability of the South Vietnamese government and to defend themselves. *P115#7*

29 Jul 69

South China Sea. Pararescuemen John Eldridge and Dennis Duffy become involved in a mission that results in an unusual twist; they rescue the enemy. An HH-3E Jolly Green flies off the North Vietnamese coast when the crew spots trouble in the water. The object of their attention is a fishing- boat in which five people are frantically waving black flags. As they descend and edge closer on a recon pass, they change the flags to white. On their second pass, Duffy notices that now only one man is waving the flag while the rest are frantically bailing water. Close examination reveals the sampan is full of fish and water, and is quickly breaking up. The Jolly drops a life raft then lowers a jungle penetrator and pulls it close enough so the North Vietnamese can leap aboard it. The USS Renshaw moves in, lowers a dinghy, and takes the fishermen to the ship where they receive food and dry clothing. The next day they are taken to DaNang and eventually returned to their homes.

August 1969

8 Aug 69

SSgt Jim Holloway volunteered to accompany a maintenance team to recover a downed HH-43F. It was in a known hostile area, near An Khe, Vietnam. They made short work of removing the rotor blades and had the disabled Huskie ready for a heavy hook helicopter to sling load out in less than one hour and twenty minutes. *Why had it gone down? Holloway folder.*

Navy H-3 downed by Ch72 with four survivors. Two rescued by Air America H-34. The other two were rescued by HH-53. *SAR logs*

10 Aug 69

Rescued Tiger FAC that bailed out near Ch113 on 9 August. First light SAR. Both pilots recovered.

25 Aug 69

PRESIDENT HO'S REPLY LETTER to PRESIDENT NIXON'S 15 JULY 69 LETTER

Hanoi, 25 August 1969 (Received in Paris on August 30)

To His Excellency Richard Milhous Nixon
President of the United States

I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of your letters.

The war of aggression of the United States against our people, violating our fundamental national rights, still continues in South Vietnam. The United States continues to intensify military operations, the B-52 bombings and the use of toxic chemical products multiply the crimes against the Vietnamese people. The longer the war goes on, it accumulates the mourning and burdens of the American people. I am extremely indignant at the losses and destruction caused by American troops to our people and our country. I am also deeply touched at the rising toll of death of young Americans who have fallen in Vietnam by reason of the policy of American governing circles.

Our Vietnamese people are deeply devoted to peace, a real peace with independence and real freedom. They are determined to fight to the end, without fearing the sacrifices and difficulties in order to defend their country and their sacred national rights. The overall solution in 10 points of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam and of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam is a logical and reasonable basis for the settlement of the Vietnamese problem. It has earned the sympathy and support of the peoples of the world.

In your letter you have expressed the desire to act for a just peace. For this the United States must cease the war of aggression and withdraw their troops from South Vietnam, respect the right of the population of the South and of the Vietnamese nation

to dispose of themselves, without foreign influence. This is the correct manner of solving the Vietnamese problem in conformity with the national rights of the Vietnamese people, the interests of the United States and the hopes for peace of the peoples of the world. This is the path that will allow the United States to get out of the war with honor.

With good will on both sides we might arrive at common efforts in view of finding a correct solution to the Vietnam Problem.

29 Aug

Operation Keystone Eagle completed

September 1969

2 Sept 69

Ho Chi Minh dies in Hanoi. The DRV politburo goes through a process to determine the future of the war of liberation of South Vietnam

4 Sept 69

T-28 shot down in the PDJ. JG 79 takes battle damage (lost guns and many hits) during attempted pickup. Forced off scene to Tango. High Bird JG 72 makes pickup but also takes multiple hits. Both HH-53's left at Tango. Crews and survivor returned on North Birds.

8 Sept 69

Three day cease fire in honor of Ho Chi Minh (*try and find out the logic on this*)

16 Sept 69

Announcement of Operation Keystone Cardinal, the withdrawal of 35,000 U.S. troops from RVN by 15 December 1969

30 Sept 69

President Nixon announces decision to withdraw 6,000 troops from Thailand by 1 July 1970

October 1969

6 Oct 69

21st SOS loses two CH-3's during mission into Laos. 8 USAF and 46 Laotian troops rescued by 40 ARRS HH-53's. HH-3's tried pickup but were forced off scene by ground fire that cause battle damage.

8 Oct 69

Boxer 61B, F-4C shot down picked up by 40th ARRS HH-53C, Red Willis goes down to get pilot hanging upside down in tree. Willis gets Silver Star for this mission. *Boxer 61 folder & Willis folder*

Two Nails had a mid-air in the same area as the downed F-4. One NAIL A&B ejected and picked up by HH-53. One other, F-4 backseater, was picked up by the high bird. HH-3s picked up the crew of the second NAIL after he crash landed. *SAR logs*

10 Oct 69

The last standard configuration AC-130 gunship was deployed to Ubon AB, Thailand, to provide additional night attack capability

24 Oct 69

On 24 October 1969, an HH-3E, SN66-13281, assigned to the 37ARRSq, Da Nang AB, RVN, was lost as a result of hostile groundfire. The "Jolly Green" was in a hover and had lowered a pararescueman (PJ) to aid an injured pilot. As the injured man and the PJ were being hoisted on the jungle penetrator, intense enemy groundfire severely damaged the helicopter, including the hoist mechanism. The hoist cable was cut free to prevent dragging the pilot and the PJ through a wooded area, as the helicopter could no longer maintain a hover. The HH-3E crash-landed approximately one mile away. The injured crew, the injured pilot, and the PJ were all recovered by another "Jolly Green". The remains of the damaged helicopter were subsequently destroyed by friendly strike aircraft to prevent enemy capture of its contents.

TECHNICAL SERGEANT DONALD G. SMITH. Mid-morning on 24 October 1969, Jolly Green 28, with Technical Sergeant Smith on board launches from the 37th ARRS, DaNang AB, RVN, to rescue two downed F-4 crewmen from "Misty 11." An airborne FAC Nail 07, radios both survivors are in contact with him, but the pilot, Misty 11A, has a broken leg. Jolly Green 28 arrives over Misty 11A and lowers Sergeant Smith by hoist. Smith immediately secures the downed crewman to the forest penetrator and gives the cable-up signal. Less than one minute has elapsed. When the men are approximately ten feet off the ground, a burst of automatic weapons fire hits the external hoist mount, dislodging it. The hoist assembly falls through the main cabin door knocking the flight engineer across to the far side of the aircraft. Realizing the hoist is inoperative, he shears the cable to release Smith and his survivor from the now wounded aircraft. Transmission oil freely flowing down its side, 28 makes it to a marshy area relatively free of bad guys, where it plops down. Jolly 76 makes three attempts to recover Sergeant Smith and the survivor, but each time they receive intense ground fire, resulting in extensive battle damage. On the ground, despite injuries received during the fall from Jolly 28, Smith cares for his survivor, directs air attacks against the enemy and repelled enemy probes for several hours. His location in tall elephant grass is grueling. The hot midday sun turns it into an oven. Smith places the survivor in a makeshift shelter to protect him, and gives the injured man the last of his water. Air strikes bracket his position. It's a windless day, and Smith

wonders about its final outcome. Suddenly, Jolly 15 swoops in and comes to a hover over Sergeant Smith. He grabs the survivor and carries him to the dangling penetrator. After successfully hoisting them aboard, Jolly 15 moves to recover Misty 11B, but to no avail. Each time it tries, it is raked with automatic weapons fire, which eventually disables its hoist, as well as the flight engineer's and pararescueman's intercom systems. A crippled Jolly 15 departs and another Jolly fights its way in. It is eventually able to recover Misty 11B. *50 years*

Jolly 283 shot up on rescue near Ch72. One HH-3 from DaNang destroyed, but the crew was recovered. Eventually, both pilots of Misty FAC rescued. *SAR logs*

29 Oct 69

The Office of Special Assistant for Vietnamization was established to serve as the Air Staff focal point for Vietnamization issues

31 Oct 69

3rd ARRGp is awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary gallantry in connection with military operations from 1 July 1967 to 31 January 1969.

October 1969. *Air Force* Magazine cover story, "The Forgotten Americans of the Vietnam War," ignites national concern for the prisoners of war and the missing in action. It is reprinted in condensed form as the lead article in the November 1969 issue of Reader's Digest and is inserted into the *Congressional Record* six times.

NOVEMBER

12 Nov 69

HH-53 from 40th ARRS rescues the front seater (Major Killen) of a downed F-4 near Mu Gia Pass. Jolly 70 took hits in main tanks, fuselage, and main rotor.

40th ARRS HH-53 piloted by Capt Cardy rescues the pilot of Zorro 65 that has been shot down on the PDJ.

15 Nov 69

250,000 people protest against the war in Washington, DC

15 Nov 69

HQ USAF approved the deployment of SURPRISE PACKAGE. This is the deployment of AC-130A Gunship II aircraft to arrive by early December for combat evaluation

16 Nov 69

F-4 crew A&B downed near Mu Gia Pass. Rescued by 40th ARRS HH-53 piloted by Capt Reader and Capt Weeks.

19 November 69

Spud 06 an Army Mohawk downed 125/80/89. 1 pilot rescued by 40th ARRS HH-53 piloted by LtCol Mateer and Capt Baskett. *SAR logs*

22 Nov 69

40th ARRS HH-53 piloted by Capt Gary Nelso and Capt Olsen make pick up at 103/73/89. They pick up USN Lt Wheeler, call sign Tape. *SAR logs*

24 Nov 69

All F-105 aircraft in SEA (four tactical fighter squadrons) were relocated to Takhli AB, Thailand.

December 1969

5 Dec 69

Boxer 22 shot down near Mu Gia Pass. Boxer 22A, Capt. Ben Danielson, pilot and Boxer 22B Lt. Woody Bergeron GIB. 22A KIA 22B recovered by Jolly's. 1 PJ KIA in this SAR *p139Whitcomb p119#7*

HH-3E's from 37th ARRS had to stop attempts to rescue Lt. Bergeron. Enemy air defenses were too strong.

6 Dec 69

AIRMAN FIRST CLASS DAVID M. DAVISON. Boxer-22, an F-4C, goes down in Laos. Although the F-4 pilot is never recovered, the navigator, First Lieutenant Woodrow J. Bergeron, Jr., is rescued. Pararescuemen Gene Nardi and Curt "Snake" Phythian are crewmembers on the Jolly that makes the most attempts to effect a recovery. Nearly forty pararescuemen participate in direct action against the enemy. Some are wounded in the fray. When it is over, five of the ten helicopters involved never fly again because of the battle damage. Five Sandy A-I's suffer heavy damage. *Source = 50 years*

7 Dec 1969

Boxer 22 rescued by 40th ARRS HH-53 piloted by LtCol Shipman. The crew of the pickup bird included PJ's Edward "Red" Willis and Steve Brooks. After two days and fourteen previous attempts an HH-53C Jolly Green Giant rescues Lt Bergeron. This rescue occurred from one of the most heavily defended hostile areas in SEA. During previous rescue attempts one Pararescueman was KIA and multiple rescue helicopters suffered battle damage. The 37th ARRS runs out of aircraft, because all of them are battle damaged from pickup attempts. 366 sorties flown over a three-day period to rescue a navigator evading capture near Ban Phonop, Laos, just outside Tchepone. *P96#7*

9 Dec 69

SSgt Al Avery rescues Maj. Robert McCann. Major McCann was on a photo recon mission over the Sou Giang River, 25 miles northwest of Dong Hoi NVN when his RF-4C was hit at 7000' by 37mm AAA. He turned his F-4 east and headed to the Gulf of Tonkin where he and his GIB Captain J. B. Koebberling ejected one mile offshore. The GIB was picked up by a second HH-3 helicopter from the 37th ARRS.

15 Dec 69

President Nixon announced the withdrawal of 50,000 additional troops from RVN by 15 April 1970

20 Dec 69

First reduction in ARRS forces occurs when Det. 10, 38 ARRS, Binh Thuy was disbanded.

21 Dec 69

40th ARRS JG 76 & 71 launched to rescue Bullwhip 12 A&B. JG 76 piloted by Sanderson and Sickterman makes pickup.

25 Dec 69

Christmas Cease-fire

28 Dec 69

Lovebug 206 downed 342/70/72. JG 37 makes pickup

31 Dec 69

Total U.S. military personnel deaths attributed to hostile action in SEA exceed 40,000

At its peak in early 1969, America had 550,000 troops in Vietnam. As the year came to an end the number of troops in Vietnam had been reduced to 475,000. It may not have been clear then, but we had begun the process of troop withdrawals that would eventually end with all combat troops pulled out of Vietnam. President Nixon had announced the Vietnamization of the war. For better or worse, the South Vietnamese would have to take over this war that had become too Americanized. But many years remained until the last American was to leave Vietnam. And in the interim, hundreds more pilots would be shot down and still need help from the air Rescuemen in Vietnam and Thailand.

Total U.S. military deaths in SEA KIA exceeded 40,000

[\[BACK TO CHRONOLOGY HOME\]](#)

[\[1965\]](#) [\[1966\]](#) [\[1967\]](#) [\[1968\]](#) [\[1969\]](#) [\[1970\]](#) [\[1971\]](#) [\[1972\]](#) [\[Glossary\]](#)