

**“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, Vietnam
...keeping the memories alive**

Phan Rang AB News No. 82

“Stories worth telling”

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Memorial Plaques Presented In Ceremony at Phan Rang *(Seventh Air Force News, March 12, 1969)*

PHAN RANG — Two plaques, dedicated to the men of Phan Rang AB who have given their lives in the battle against communism in Vietnam, were unveiled recently in the base chapel here.

The plaques were purchased with funds contributed by members of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, 315th Special Operations Wing, and Det. 1, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, all Phan Rang-based units.

One plaque, now standing in the chapel, is a large Philippine mahogany carving and, in the words of Col. Frank L. Gailer Jr., Arlington, Va., 35th TFW commander, is "a permanent memorial to those members of our wing who have paid that last full measure of devotion—giving their lives in the service of their country.

"These men have brought honor not only to themselves and their country, but have also won the confidence, respect and admiration of freedom-loving people everywhere," he said.

The second plaque, presented to the men of the rescue detachment, shows a miniature helicopter atop a pyramidal base.

Engraved on the base are the names of a five-man crew who lost their lives when their HH43B "Pedro" crashed on Oct. 10, 1968. Maj. John C. Acton Jr., Jacksonville, Ark., rescue detachment commander, said the plaque will be displayed in a prominent location in their unit operations.

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Saluting the crew, he told the assembled rescuemen, "they served their country faithfully and courageously and will long be remembered for their leadership, personal endeavor and devotion to duty."

Phan Rang's Officers' Mess Receives Professional Touch (*Seventh Air Force News, March 12, 1969*)

PHAN RANG — There is no AFSC in the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing's manning document for an interior decorator, but the new Phan Rang Officers Open Mess will definitely bear the traces of a professional's touch, thanks to A1C Hunter Stone of the 120th Tactical Fighter Squadron.

Airman Stone, a personal equipment specialist, was owner of his own interior decorating firm in Denver before being called to active duty with the Air National Guard unit during the Pueblo crisis of early 1968.

Tipped by SSgt. Paul Coffee, a fellow former Air Guardsman now working at the present "O" Club, the club's board of governors approached Airman Stone, who readily accepted the task, even though "it means burning the midnight oil for quite a few nights."

"When I started out, I wanted to design the interior of the new club to not only be durable, but to be one of the better looking clubs in the Air Force, particularly in the Far East," he said.

To meet these self-imposed goals, the guardsman has chosen an Edwardian era motif. "I was seeking a masculine effect," he said.

He will rely heavily on mahogany paneling, black naugahyde, a burgundy coloring for the runs, and false beams for the ceiling.

The VIP room will be highlighted by a large burgundy loop rug with the 35th TFW's emblem weaved into the center. This room will also have a black naugahyde wainscoating, black leatherette chairs and indirect lighting.

The bar will include three smoked glass mirrors, separated by moss rock dividers, and illuminated by hand-hammered carriage lamps, the same type lamps that will line the hallway leading from the double entrance front door to the bar. The bar itself will have a padded black naugahyde front, with brass footrail.

Present plans call for the bar wing to be open in two months; the dining wing in six months. The interior decorating job is the second bit of "moonlighting" for Airman Stone. Since his arrival in country with the former Colorado ANG unit last May, the tall, trim airman has been averaging about \$200 a month as a volunteer barber.

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His present customers read like a "Who's Who" at Phan Rang AB.

He is looking forward to that day in May when he can re-enter the decorating field in Denver, selling his ideas to hotels, motels and apartment buildings. He looks forward to relaxing in someone else's barber chair, getting a razor cut and having some cute chick giving him a manicure.

He plans to give up barbering the minute he reverts back to ANG status. "If I ever see another head of hair, I'm going to go crazy," he yelled. Meanwhile, he's thankful for the chance to decorate the Phan Rang "O" Club. It's sort of a transition back to his former occupation after nearly a year of fitting parachutes and checking out survival gear.

(My apologies to you if you recognize that this story has already run in a previous issue of the Phan Rang News. It is so familiar to me, but I can't find where I used it before. As with all stories about Phan Rang it is too important not to share with everyone so here it is again.)

Phan Rang Pilots Commended *(Seventh Air Force News, March 12, 1969)*

PHAN RANG — Two pilots of the 120th Tactical Fighter Squadron here received a letter of commendation for a recent mission they flew in support of a Special Forces camp at Cai Cai.

One of the ex-Colorado Air National Guard pilots was Capt. Robert G. Beabout, Casey, III. The mission was flown in the Mekong Delta after the pilots were scrambled from the alert pad here in the early morning hours.

The letter stated, ". . . this flight quickly orientated themselves, grasped the situation, and planned their attack in a professional manner . . . they demonstrated the highest standards of skill and accurate ordnance delivery resulting in three bunkers destroyed and an estimated 20 enemy soldiers killed."

Subsequent reports from the Special Forces camp confirmed that the air strike was responsible for 40 enemy soldiers killed.

". . . the flight is to be commended," the letter continued, "for the valor they displayed in making repeated accurate runs at automatic weapons positions under extremely adverse conditions. This outstanding air strike was achieved at night working under flares in unfamiliar terrain while under heavy automatic weapons fire."

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What A Mess...a pictorial



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War Zone Reports

Little Jets Pack Big Punch (*Seventh Air Force News, March 12, 1969*)

By SSgt. Jack Swift

BIEN HOA—At Bien Hoa AB, busiest airfield in the world, two Texans played a casual card game next to a shell-shaped, revetment housing their A-37 attack fighter jets. Maj. Don E. Ellis, of Bryan, checked the alert schedule with 1st Lt. Charlie M. Carter, of San Marcos, to see who was to replace them on the night shift.

They were unaware that they would soon be playing white knight to the Army. Down on the tip of the enemy-infested Mekong Delta a company of U.S. infantry had surprised a North Vietnamese infiltration element near their base camp. A fierce firelight erupted. Then the larger enemy force regrouped and began pushing the U.S. company toward a river. In an hour the friendlies had their backs to the water.

The field commander grabbed a radio and barked into it. "We're getting hemmed in. See if you can get us some air support."

At Bien Hoa an alarm clanged, sounding something like a rock 'n' roller using the Liberty Bell for a snare drum. Major Ellis reached for the hotline and got target coordinates and details of the emergency. Yanking survival gear over their flightsuits on the run, the Texans raced for their poised machines.

The crew chiefs were already pulling safety flags from the bombs on the A-37, and a technician was arranging switches on the electrical starting units. Two General Electric J85-17A engines on each aircraft whined into action. The pilots knew that every second of delay could mean some Army troop was losing his life.

The two vaulted into their cockpits and ran quickly over the checklists. Everything looked good.

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Major Ellis pulled out of the shelter and taxied toward the runway. Lieutenant Carter was right behind him. They got airborne fast and switched to the proper radio channels to get information on artillery and the weather situation in the trouble area.

They climbed to 20,000 feet where they could fly with maximum speed (the thin air increases relative ground velocity at that altitude) and edged closer together. Lieutenant Carter dipped lower and eyed the leader's aircraft, then Major Ellis returned the favor. Both airplanes looked fine.

A hundred miles later they began a descent and increased their airspeed. Checkpoints on a map showed that they were nearing the area they were to rendezvous with the forward air controller.

Major Ellis made contact with the controller and got specifics on the fighting. The FAC also informed the fighters which targets needed bombing most badly. The enemy was using a treeline for a shield and was expected to mount an attack against the friendlies any moment.

The voice of an anxious infantryman broke into the net: "It's getting hot down here. We could sure use some fire right on that treeline. I've pulled my forward line back a little, and we'll keep our heads down—so blast away, fellas."

"Roger," Major Ellis said crisply.

The major inverted his wings and rolled into a dry run to get a close look at the enemy position. On his slide toward the trees a stream of red tracers arced up at him.

Then the FAC crisscrossed the point and shot a smoke rocket into a clump of brush. "There's your bullseye," he clipped.

The pilots knew they would have to be careful. If they missed by even a few meters some friendly troops could get hurt.

The younger attack pilot whipped into a tight gyre and headed for the smoke column. In the power dive, he jammed the throttle and picked up speed. As the ground rushed up he could make out the uniforms on the enemy gunners. A second before he passed the smoke he punched a button and a 500-pound bomb jerked crazily toward a swarming gun crew.

"Right on the money!" the FAC reported.

Major Ellis was already heading for the smoke again. He laid his bombs in a staircase along a series of bunkers. Both men flew several more passes, bombing and strafing, and as they spun back to Bien Hoa, they looked down and saw they had left the treeline a shredded, smoking ruins.

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A mass of U.S. Army soldiers, their automatic weapons spitting into the forest, were re-crossing the clearing on the run.

Back at home base the pilots checked their aircraft carefully for damage and filled out a report on the mission. A week later a letter from the commander of that ground operation told that the air support had "really saved our skins."

Bien Hoa's 604th Special Operations Squadron is the only Air Force A-37 outfit in the world. The mini-fighter was specially designed to meet the counterinsurgency operations and close air support for ground forces in Vietnam. A modified version of the T-37 trainer, it has about three times the power and twice the gross weight of the trainer, which has been in production since 1955.

"We are super proud of our A-37," the lieutenant grinned. "It's really a versatile aircraft."

"In fact, during the Tet (Vietnamese Lunar New Year) offensive last year, when the city of Hue was nearly overrun, the ground commanders called in air strikes right on the walls of the citadel. Heavy clouds surrounded the city and some of the heavier fighters had to turn away. A flight of A-37's, however, was able to maneuver in and smashed the attackers right on the walls. Our squadron was credited with turning the attack that day."

On the efficiency of the airplane in combat, Lieutenant Carter commented. "If we miss a target by 20 meters we're disappointed. The 37 is a very stable bomber. And because of our tight turning radius, we can deliver our ordnance quickly."

On the Delta mission described in this article, the FAC reported that the two had placed their ordnance within five meters of the contact point.

An incidental, comfortable feature of the A-37 is that it's hard to hit with ground fire, probably because it's so small. A recent study showed that, for the numbers of hours flown, the 604th has about one-fifth the hits that the heavier fighters have.

Somebody once said that if you want to know how much combat a man has seen, look at his eyes. A couple of years ago the most important business of Lieutenant Carter's eyes was the flared skirts of a cheerleader. But today they reflect the serenity and confidence, and more than a little pain, that come only from war. New pilots in Vietnam, generally, get it quickly.

But along with the energetic young pilots, there are older men who bring long experience to the squadron. Major Ellis is one of them. The major and Lieutenant went through A-37 training at England AFB, La., and survival training at Fairchild AFB, Wash., before Vietnam.

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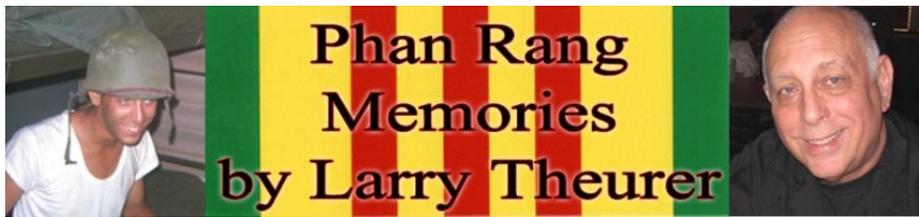
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The major has flown more than 230 missions in the combat zone without getting a single hit. He volunteered for Vietnam from the Air Force Academy and has been at Bien Hoa since June of last year. He likes the A-37 because it's easy to maintain, relatively inexpensive and sturdy. And for those same reasons, he says, 604th pilots fly more combat sorties. Major Ellis himself logged 100 missions in his first 67 days in country.

About his airplane Major Ellis said, "The A-37 is easy to fly. In fact, the officers who just graduated from pilot training are doing a bang-up job here, despite their lack of experience.

(Robert Chappelle who had a tour of duty at Phan Rang as a C-123 Provider pilot and crewmember volunteered for a second Vietnam tour of duty at Bien Hoa to fly the A-37s. He writes about it in his book [“Tales of Bien Hoa”](#). It’s a fascinating book and you really feel his pain and frustration with his flight instructor (he eventually became one himself) and he writes with so much detail you feel like you are in the cockpit with him. His tour of duty at Phan Rang AB is documented in his book [“Tales of Phan Rang”](#), both of them available at Smashwords. Click on the hyperlinked title to get more information on the books.)



VISIT PHAN RANG CITY

On my day off A1C Jim Avery and his friend Cavanaugh invited me to go to Phan Rang city with them. I took a picture of the white sign at the main gate warning **“You are leaving a secure area. VC use bar girls for information. Don’t talk about military subjects”**.

At the gate was a Vietnamese man with a golf cart like vehicle which was to be our taxi to town. We got in the back and as we are riding along when Cavanaugh spies the rubber fuel line on the little engine behind the driver, sneaks his hand down and pinches it shut until the motor stumbled. The driver frantically looks all around as Cavanaugh quickly removed his hand, and sat there with an innocent face and the motor came back to life. He pulls this trick on the driver about 5 times before the guy wised up and swore at him in Vietnamese.

We arrived in Phan Rang, give the pissed off driver a nice tip and see three 3-wheeled Peditcycles, two wheels and a seat in front, one wheel and a peddler in back. We each climb into one and Cavanaugh request the three peddlers’ to have a race as fast as they can go. They did, pedaling like hell, flying through the streets. I think Avery’s man won.

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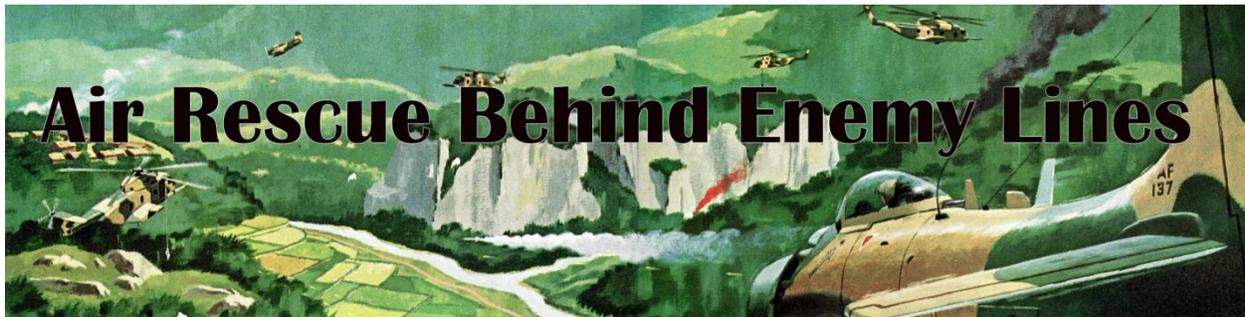
We walked through the main market, seeing all kinds of fish in baskets there. Cavanaugh spies one with a big mouth and picks it up and is working it like a ventriloquist dummy. A furious Vietnamese woman comes running over swearing at him in Vietnamese, grabs the fish and washes it off.

We crossed a bridge over the Phan Rang River. It had stone steps going down to the water. In the mud colored water there were Vietnamese women washing baskets of laundry.

We visited a barber shop and got haircuts. I was frightened when after cutting my hair; the non-English speaking barber began waving a straight razor by my neck. He just was gesturing to do a shave. Avery watching was shaking his head “No”. I declined. A unique part of the Vietnamese haircut was the barbers cleaning our ears with little spinning bamboo bow and arrow shaped tools.

We found a bar and sat on couches in a shaded patio. I had my first taste of “33 Bom-de-Bom” Vietnamese beer. The flavor was OK, not great like Philippine San Miguel, but it had strange after effects. My heart began pounding and my forehead perspiring even though we were sitting in the shade. The rumor was the brewers used formaldehyde instead of alcohol in that beer. After drinking that the rest of the day was a blur until we were back at the main gate.

Air Rescue Behind Enemy Lines, conclusion



Smoke Puff Signals Hovering Chopper

Homing in on beeper signals from radios carried in every airman's survival vest, the rescue helicopters hover over the area, 50 to 200 feet above the ground. Because the jungle is so dense and tall, crewmen seldom see the man they are trying to rescue, but usually they are in radio contact. The chopper waits until the downed flier "pops smoke," and the telltale wisp of white or red from the chemical-filled canister drifts through the canopy of leaves.

On the right side of the Jolly Green, an outrigger holds a hoist mechanism with 250 feet of 3/16-inch steel cable wound on a drum. Attached to the free end of the cable is the jungle penetrator, a 26-pound metal device shaped like a giant arrowhead with three narrow paddle

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seats folded against its sides. It is partially wrapped in a canvas cover to minimize damage as it plummets downward, penetrates the jungle roof, splinters branches, skids off tree trunks, and finally lands—as close as possible to the anxious airman. He pulls a paddle down, straddles it, and holds on for dear life as the hoist reels him up to safety. If the survivor reports by his hand radio that he is injured, a PJ rides down on the penetrator and brings him up.

The rescue crews in the Jolly Greens must push luck and endurance to the limits if they are to succeed. They must worry about the fuel holding out, about control of the ship when a man is on the penetrator and ground fire is knocking holes in everything, about hanging the survivor or the PJ in the iron grip of a tree, about the weather closing down suddenly, about heading for an emergency field only to find it overrun by the enemy.



Battle tension grips a backup team at Udorn during a massive lifesaving mission. Listening to radioed reports from the scene, worried pilots and pararescuemen—called “Us” from an older designation, parajumpers—share the strain of their buddies under fire. On the telephone, operations officer Lt. Col. Garland York receives an order from nearby command headquarters: “Alert reserve chopper.”

The men who gathered now around the radio in the operations shack at Udorn were solemn because they lived daily with those worries. The rescue team was converging at the site of the downed plane. Four fighter planes, Douglas A-1H Skyraiders, had scrambled from Udorn at the first news of the crash. In the rescue team, the fighters are called Sandys. Their job is to protect the helicopters during the rescue.

The plane and the nine men had been down' for about an hour when the radio at Udorn crackled on. It was Sandy Lead reporting from North Viet Nam: "Made low passes. No ground fire as yet. Have most of the parachutes located."

Two Jolly Greens from Da Nang and two others from Nakhon Phanom were nearing the area, and now Marty Donohue, in the Buff from Udorn, came on: "Give me a heading. We'll be there in 15 minutes."

There is a roaring amount of radio

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chatter during a rescue—helicopter crewmen coaching their pilots, Sandys talking amongst themselves, choppers talking to Sandys, beepers from the jungle below going in everyone's ears. At 1:30, Sandy Lead reported again: "Jolly Green 10 going in to make a pickup." And a little later: "Jolly Green 10 is over another who is hanging upside down in his chute."

Lt. Col. Garland York, the detachment operations officer, was standing beside me. He said: "I'll bet Marty has bitten his pipe stem in two. Da Nang's got two already." Tremendous rivalry exists among the rescue men; each team wants to make more combat saves than the others.

I could visualize the scene, for I had been in that enemy area-5,000-foot jungle mountains that slope into high valleys. Sheer, whitefaced cliffs of limestone stand out from the green forest like islands with flat rock tops (preceding pages). I remembered the dusty roads along the edges of the fast rivers, and the thatched mountain villages that cling to the high ground. All of us at Udorn knew that those roads were alive with enemy troops hurrying to capture the downed Americans and to break up the rescue with ground fire. Every moment was precious.

Three Jolly Greens were now at the scene, and Donohue in the Buff and the fourth JG were held in reserve. Before 2 o'clock, Sandy Lead reported again: "Have six people aboard the Jollies, three still in area. Might have to launch alpha romeo up here if we get in a bind. Jollies had to dump fuel."

Crown Feeds Fuel to Flying Jolly

"Alpha romeo" means aerial refueling. The smaller choppers had needed all the power they could muster to hover in that high, thin mountain air. They had dumped their extra fuel overboard to lighten the load, and some did not have enough to return to base.

When that happens, as it often does over North Viet Nam, a Crown joins the Sandys, Jollies, and Buffs. It is a Lockheed Hercules HC-130P that has been circling high above the action and out of



Thirsty bug, a Buff refuels by slipping its 16-foot proboscis into a flowerlike drogue on one of two fuel hoses that trail behind a Lockheed HC-130P. The chopper must synchronize speed for as long as ten minutes while it drinks from the flying filling station, called Crown.

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The Jollys have 7-foot probes that can be extended to 16 feet for refueling. With their load of saved—and sometimes wounded—men, they often must seek out the Crown for fuel. Their probes gulp as much as 200 gallons a minute once they link up with the drogue hoses that trail behind the big Lockheed.

Now Udorn command was urgently asking Sandy Lead: "Did everyone get out of the wreckage?"

"Jolly Green 10 has copilot of plane aboard and he advises he saw only four chutes besides his own...."

Then, at 2 o'clock, came another report: "JG 37 is making another pickup."

Smiles broke out all around in the operations shack.

"That's seven, out of nine," said Colonel York. The record number of saves over enemy territory up to then was eight at one time, and the men at Udorn were elated at the spectacular success of this rescue mission.

It was now after 2 o'clock. Two Jollys headed for the Crown to get aerial refills, and two others turned for home. Then a beeper signal was reported from the ground. Was it a trap?

Enemy Tries to Lure Rescue Crews

This is one of the constant worries of the ARRS over North Viet Nam. Using captured radios, the North Vietnamese put up beeper signals, hoping to lure a rescue team within range of their guns.

As a countermeasure, Rescue Control Headquarters keeps a secret question-and-answer card for every airman on a mission to the north. Before a JG is committed, the man on the ground is quizzed by radio.

I learned later that during this rescue near Khe Sanh, one of the Jollys had asked one of the downed men for authenticating answers.

"What kind of car do you drive?"

"A Volkswagen," came the reply.

"What is the code name of your mission?"

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"Classmate."

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"What is your wife's first name?"

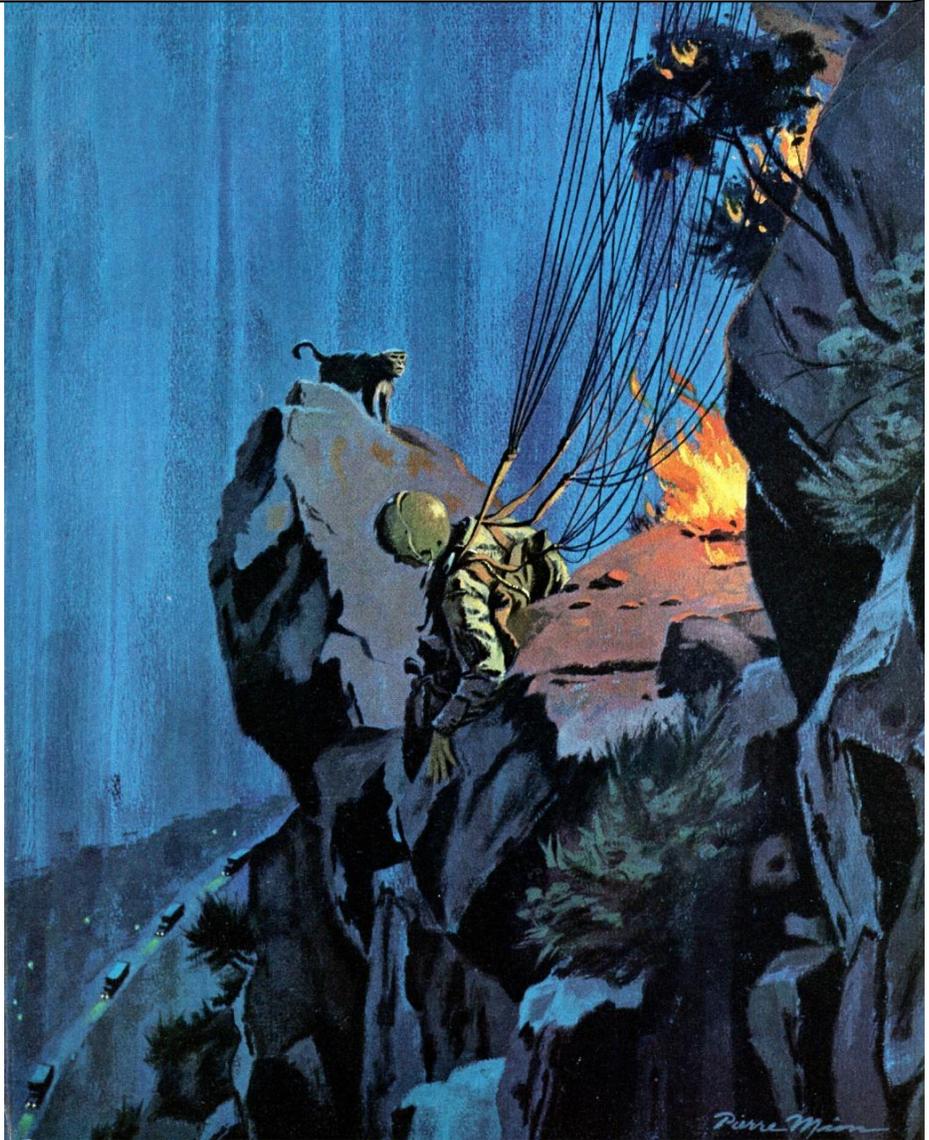
There was a long and awkward silence. Stress does strange things to the mind. Finally: "Good Lord, I can't remember!"

The man was saved, but he might have faced a fate worse than capture if his wife had found out about that lapse.

Now Major Donohue was ordered in to investigate the last beeper signal. One of the survivors in the Jollys had said he thought a man was still in the plane and wounded. But no further signals came from below. Perhaps the man was too badly wounded to reply. Or was it the enemy down there, watching and waiting with loaded guns?

No word came from Donohue until nearly 3 o'clock. Then we received this: "Heavy ground fire. Receiving heavy ground fire. Have a leak."

Night on the brink of disaster: Pinned where he landed in a rock crevice, Capt. Herbert Altman becomes an unwilling spectator as trucks rumble south along the Ho Chi Minh Trail 1,000 feet below. The navigator bailed out during a night strike last December. Drawn by the flaming wreckage of his plane, enemy troops search the area; a friendly monkey keeps him company.



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The men in the shack stiffened. It had been a trap! Colonel York kept saying to himself.

"Return the fire, return the fire." Each Buff is equipped with three Miniguns, 7.62-mm. automatic weapons. Now the Sandys, too, reported heavy fire, and Udorn command ordered all rescue craft out of the area.

I asked Colonel York what shape Major Donohue was in.

"If the hydraulic system fails, the controls can go in a split second and you can't fight it. If the leak is in the fuel tank, thank God. There's special sealant in there, or we would have lost three aircraft by now."

At dawn, a chopper arrives and lowers a yellow jungle penetrator, right. Catching it, Altman wrenched himself loose from the crevice, but became ensnarled in a tangle of parachute lines and branches; three pulls from the hoist finally freed him for the lifesaving lift.

Sandy Leads Crippled Buff to Safety

As we talked, the radio broke in with an urgent message from a Sandy to Donohue. "You are going into a bad area, a bad area."

The crippled Buff was about to cross a heavily defended branch of the main north-south supply route from North into South Viet Nam. It was bristling with 37-mm. and 57-mm. radar-

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controlled anti-aircraft guns, probably the same ones that had brought down the plane they went in to help.

The Sandy guided Major Donohue safely around the bad area, and he eventually landed at an emergency strip. Later he called in on "lima-lima"—land-line telephone—with a battle report: One bullet hole through the tail rotor drive shaft. Two hydraulic lines severed. One hit in the electronics compartment. One bullet stuck in the refueling probe. Twenty-four bullet holes in the helicopter. But all hands survived.

A few days later I chatted at length with the 3rd Rescue Group's commander.

"Things were a little makeshift when we first started the rescue operation out here," Colonel Leske recalled. "Before the Jolly Greens, and later the Buffs, appeared, we flew the little Kaman HH-43 Pedros with wooden counter-rotating blades. We carried 50-gallon drums of fuel aboard. When the tanks ran low, we would crank a pump by hand and load the fuel through rubber hoses. Then we would kick the barrel out of the helicopter to make room for the survivor."

With Sikorsky engineers, Colonel Leske helped tailor the Air Force CH-3C to rescue needs. The result was the HH-3E, the Jolly Green now in use over North Viet Nam. The cabin of the still-newer HH-53B, the Buff, is roomy. Two gas-turbine engines drive its rotors. These ships have witnessed every imaginable emergency.

Flier Ejects Into Pitch-black Night

One episode, which I found unforgettable, involved Capt. Herbert (Hesh) Altman of Boston. I heard about it when he dropped by Udorn to thank the PJ's who saved his life.

Hesh graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1962. At 29, lean and round-faced, he had the virile look that a bad scar on cheek and forehead gives a handsome man. He was on his fifteenth mission, flying as navigator in the back seat of a McDonnell F-4D Phantom II, when he ejected, or "punched out." "We were on a night mission to hit the supply route just south of the Mu Gia Pass," he said when I asked him the details. "You know the place. It's an area of volcanic crags and steep limestone cliffs. We rolled in over the trucks on a rocket pass, pickled two rockets against the trucks, and jinked."

Hesh used "pickled" for "fired"; by "jinked," he meant making a sudden change in the plane's altitude and direction to keep radar-controlled weapons from scoring a hit.

"As we jinked, I saw tracers cross in an X right over our canopy, and I said, 'Judas, they almost got us,' to nobody in particular. But they had got us. We pulled up suddenly and then nosed over. We were down from 6,000 feet to 4,000 in 15 seconds.

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"My pilot yelled, 'Get out, Hesh, get out, get out,' and I ejected. It was 7 o'clock and a pitch-black moonless night.

"I saw the plane continue its dive after I got out. It buried itself in the steep slope of the cliff beneath me, doing 500 knots in a 30-degree dive, and when it exploded, parts of it hit me while I was still falling. I thought I was going to die right there.

"Then my chute popped, and I was in the air only five seconds before I hit. The chute caught in tree branches, slowing the fall before I slammed into a rock crevice so tightly that circulation was cut in both my legs. I noticed I had lost my watch, and the right side of my head was wet and sticky from a burn where I had been hit by the flying debris.



Like a swarm of buzzing hornets, a precision team zooms in to snatch airmen from the enemy's grasp. On a slope above the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a U. S. plane shot down by North Vietnamese antiaircraft billows black smoke, right. Twin-tailed Cessna spotting planes, still on the scene, spied crewmen's parachutes. Now one of four Douglas Skyraider A-1H's, foreground, spits gunfire and rockets at machine gunners near a prisoner-of-war camp, left. Close by, a hovering Jolly Green hoists a flier aboard; two others spot chutes and a red smoke flare, and home in on radioed distress beeps. A Buff searches near the smoldering wreck; a refueling plane circles at upper left. After five grueling hours, seven survivors rode copters to safety.

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"I got out my radio and called the wingman who was circling overhead. I told him, 'I'm stuck in a crevice down here next to the burning airplane.'

"He answered, 'Have you spotted.'

"I looked down the mountain slope below me, about 1,000 feet straight down. On came North Vietnamese truck headlights along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It looked like a Los Angeles freeway. I will never know why they couldn't see me hanging in that rock. In a period of about 20 minutes, I counted 40 trucks.

"Then my pilot, who was down somewhere near me, came in on his rescue radio, talking to the wingman in the air.

"He half whispered, 'They're coming down the hill with lanterns. There are bad guys all over the place. I don't think I'm going to make it. I'm signing off. Don't come in on beeper in the morning.' "

Hesh wondered where his pilot was. He later learned that the pilot had buried himself in shrubs at the bottom of the slope near the road and had remained hidden the whole night as regular North Vietnamese soldiers searched for him with lanterns.

"After a long time," Hesh said, "the Sandys showed up and advised that rescue was not going to attempt a pickup that night. They told me to hang loose and they would be back at dawn."

All through that long night Hesh had visitors, small animals he could hear scrambling around him. He was illuminated at times by fires started by chunks of burning aircraft.

Visitor Entertains a Lonely Airman

"About midnight," Hesh went on, "a chestnut-brown monkey came to see the burning wreckage and I said, 'Hi, monkey.' I petted her for about an hour, happy to have company. I scratched her under the chin and she really liked that. Seemed to me that she had been petted before. She crawled up and kept playing with my vest. I was trying to get my strobe light out in case I had a chance to signal. I had to take off my gloves to do it, and the monkey stole my gloves.

"I dozed off, but every time the wind blew, parts of the aircraft would fall out of the trees. I imagined noises behind me, even thought I heard bolt-action rifles being cocked.

"About daybreak I felt numb from the waist down and was hurting everywhere. It took two hands to use my radio. My batteries were loose and had to be held in place.

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"About 0600 a Crown showed up and asked me for ten seconds of beep. I gave it to them. Then my pilot came on the air from down below and asked the Sandys to strafe the road. A work crew had appeared at dawn and was working 20 feet from his position.

"There was no firing other than their strafing, but over the hill a war was going on as Sandys hit AA gun positions.

"At 0745 I heard the choppers come in. I told them to get my aircraft commander first because he was down there with the bad guys. I had a bird's-eye view of the rescue with the chopper only 100 yards away.

"After they pulled the AC aboard, the same chopper came after me. Then we ran into problems. I was wedged in the rock and couldn't move. I asked to have the PJ come down to get me, but every time he got close he missed me. They just couldn't hover near enough because of the sheer cliff. The down draft whipped my parachute around my neck. Finally they swung the penetrator in like a pendulum and I grabbed it and pulled myself out of the crevice. I went up and down three times, messed up in chute, shroud lines, and branches. The third time up, they pulled me aboard, and I just lay on my back in the helicopter looking up at the PJ.

"I said, 'God, you look beautiful.'

"These Jolly Green boys are a breed all by their lonesome. As happy as we were to get picked up, the Jolly Greens were even happier to have done it."

Another visitor to Udorn when I was there was Capt. Gregory A. M. Etzel from Albany, Georgia, who wears the coveted Air Force Cross among his decorations. He came limping in on crutches one morning. He was injured on January 15, 1968—a day those who lived through it will never forget.

It began when an Air Force plane with seven men aboard was hit by an air-to-air missile fired by a MIG-21 and went down about 80 miles west of Hanoi. When rescue got the call, Captain Etzel with a crew of four took off in a Jolly Green for the crash site.

"Visibility was 50 feet," he said, "and clouds were pouring like milk over the edge of the cliff. We had one more ridge to cross when we hit the mountainside. The rotor blades broke on impact, the right front section of the cockpit fell off, and I was thrown clear of the ship still strapped in my seat."

The rescue crew suffered serious injuries. Captain Etzel had a broken leg. Capt. David Holt, the copilot, had a broken foot. The PJ, Sgt. Angus Sowell, had broken both a leg and an arm. Two others in the crew, A2c James Sadderley and Staff Sgt. Elwood (Jim) Beam, had escaped injury.

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The five men found themselves on a rock face that dropped at a 45-degree angle. Clouds and mist swirled over them, making prompt rescue impossible. The rock they were on was black and slippery with wet vegetation and moss. They tied stretchers to the ruins of the helicopter to keep the injured men level and waited in the fog.

Now there were two ships, the Air Force plane and the rescue helicopter, with a total of 12 men, down in North Viet Nam.

The uninjured men of the rescue crew, Sadderley and Beam, found some jungle water vines on the mountainside below the wreck and worked for almost two hours squeezing out one and a half quarts. On the morning of the third day, hoping to find a spring, they climbed down to a little ledge, but heard noises and voices through the thick fog about 20 feet away. They quietly crept back up the hill and broke out weapons. There they sat, a small and crippled armed camp.

The weather cleared on the morning of the 17th, and the men at Udorn set out to find both downed crews.

The pickup of the plane crew came first. I spoke later with Airman Michael Dodd of San Antonio, Texas, and Sgt. Jack Hoover—the PJ's who pulled the plane survivors out.

Dodd said the jungle was so thick they passed right over the aircraft commander at 50 yards. When he popped smoke, it took three minutes to drift up through the foliage.

Assignment Decided by Toss of a Coin

The plane commander had a broken leg, and Dodd went down on the penetrator to get him. He had won the toss that morning; the winner among the PJ's goes down first.

They located two other survivors. Hoover remembers when they got the second one, a pilot-navigator, up to the Buff. "He went to the back of the cabin where his aircraft commander was lying on a stretcher, and they just hugged each other for a long time out of relief at being saved."

No trace was found of the other four crew members, who presumably were captured. A second Udorn Buff, under the command of Capt. Russell Cayler and with the operations officer, Colonel York, aboard, had been searching in vain for their comrades lost on the mountainside.

"Our escort Sandy," Cayler told me, "had engine trouble, so we started back. We were about five minutes on our way home when I decided to make a last effort to find Captain Etzel and his crew. We turned around and went back alone. About that time, another Sandy showed up and

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spotted the wreckage. He snapped his wing to indicate the position and then we saw a pen flare and red smoke."

What followed is a measure of the caliber of the nerves of men of the ARRS. Again, it is best told largely in the words of Captain Cayler, who lived it: "Now we really started to sweat. The Sandy was reporting only five minutes to complete cloud cover. For some unknown reason fuel was leaking from our main fuel tanks. With the leak we were only 15 minutes to 'bingo' fuel [just enough to return to base].

"The communications jam-up was impossible. I was getting voices from Crown, from Sandys, from my own crew, and beeps from the survivors' radio. I remember hearing the engineer say 'Sir, the cable is fraying' and then 'Sir, I don't think the cable will hold' and finally 'Sir, are you listening?' I finally had to order everyone off the air so I could talk to my hoist operator. I thought to myself, Cayler, if you don't get these boys now, you won't have a second chance.

"Well, we made seven trips on that hoist with the cable fraying and recovered the five survivors and our own two PJ's. We were hovering about 100 feet off the cliff and occasionally tipped the tree branches with our rotor blades.

"The Sandys kept warning us about the weather, and Udorn kept asking us about our fuel level. With all survivors now aboard, we started to gain altitude. I remembered a chimney of limestone right behind us, but in less than 15 seconds we were in the clouds. Everything whited out. Finally we broke out at 4,000 feet and, bam, both engines began to die. We started sinking back into the soup. The rpm on the left engine gauge unwound and dropped to 20 percent, the right engine to 50 percent. Without thinking, I shouted: `Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!'

"I slammed the right engine into cross feed, thinking it was fuel starvation. Colonel York slammed the left engine to cross feed. The right engine caught and came back. The left engine went dead completely.

"A Sandy pulled up alongside. 'We've got only one engine going,' I told him.

"He asked, 'Can you hold your own?'

"I answered, 'I think so.'"

Captain Cayler explained that his only hope was to reach an emergency field. He was low on fuel and had trouble holding altitude. He had two heavily defended main roads to cross, and he'll never understand why he didn't get shot down. But he made it, with ten exhausted but happy men.

Flaming Grass Draws Enemy Fire

Two other fliers came to Udorn on trips they had not expected to make—Capt. Tracy Dorsett and Captain Corder, whom I mentioned earlier. Their F-4D Phantom II was leading a strike on an airbase northwest of Hanoi in February, 1968, when both engines and the fuel system were damaged by anti-aircraft fire.

"I thought at first," said Captain Corder, "that we could rendezvous with a KC-135 and refuel, but we were burning it up too fast. Tracy asked me to look for an ejection spot, and we headed for the highest and roughest terrain we could find. I punched out first and Tracy followed. We went down into trees that must have been 150 feet high, but my chute snagged on a small tree, and I was left hanging only six inches above the ground."

Captain Dorsett, the aircraft commander, told me that his chute went through the trees without catching, and he spilled down a steep slope of knee-deep grass and vines. He found himself on a ridge line about a mile from Corder. A well-traveled road skirted the area; both men knew that meant trouble. Their wingman, circling overhead, alerted rescue headquarters. Sandys were on the scene in 15 minutes, followed by Buffs from Udorn.

When Dorsett set a flare to mark his position, he accidentally set the grass around him on fire. As the smoke billowed up, North Vietnamese troops on the road started firing toward it. One of the Udorn Buffs closed in and returned the fire while another made the pickup of Corder.

That was when Corder hung onto the penetrator so hard they almost had to pry it out of his hands. The pickup of Dorsett followed.

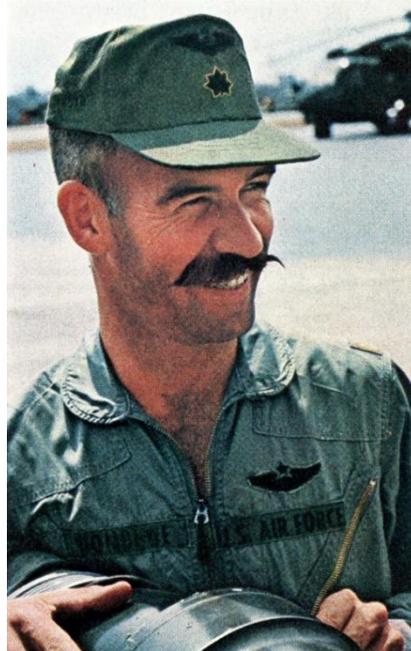
A Phan Rang Rescue

On 29 December 1968, Captain Joseph O'Neill, 120th TFW, flying his F-100C was shot down due to hostile ground fire. Captain O'Neill ejected safely and was recovered unhurt by an Army Helicopter of the 64th Advanced Team (Outlaw 15), MACV. Captain O'Neill was flying again two days later. He's kept in close contact with his rescuers, WO Don Isenburg and WO Mike Haley (passed away about 4 years ago) ever since.

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**“Stories worth telling”
“The bravest men I’ve met”**

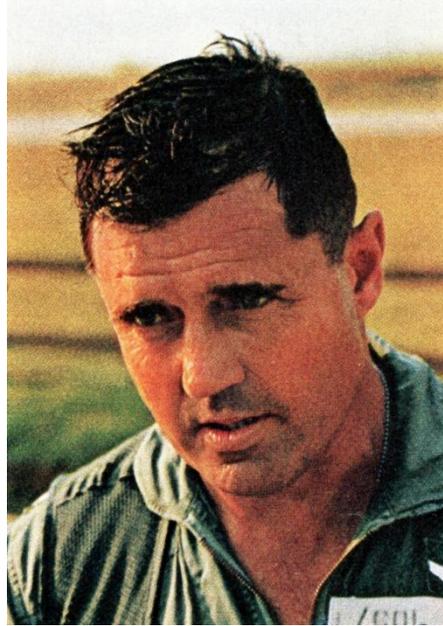


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“Stories worth telling”

THUS AUTHOR SOCHUREK, veteran of 19 trips to report on the Viet Nam war, characterizes the selfless men of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service. Capt. Gregory A. M. Etzel, still on crutches, crashed while attempting to recover seven downed fliers west of Hanoi. He and his crew lived off the jungle for three days before another team pulled them out. First Lt. Leone Russo (right) flew as copilot with Maj. Frederic M. Donohue when their Buff limped back riddled with 24 bullet holes. Checking in after a long and exhausting mission, Lt. Col. James M. Dixon (lower), commander of a rescue detachment, wears the war on his face. All dedicate themselves to the ARRS motto, **“That others may live.”**



Few Jobs So Satisfying

When the history of the Viet Nam war is written, there should be a place in it for the air-rescue drama and the words of Air Force Capt. Jerrold D. Ward: "Your first pickup," he told me, "is really something—to look back and see the smile on that guy's face. There are very few jobs devoted to saving men's lives, and this is one of them. I may never do anything else in my life that is so satisfying." THE END



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This newsletter was compiled by Douglas Severt.