

1963-64

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9 March 63

An U.S. Army OV-1 "Mohawk" aircraft crashed near the top of a 6,000' mountain in the Central Highlands. Two U.S. Marine H-34's were sent to conduct SAR at the crash site. They both crashed while attempting to conduct a mission they were not trained for. The JRRCC pressed its case that trained Air Rescue crews were required to conduct SAR missions.

August 63

Maj. Alan Saunders, Det. 3 PARC/CC, prepared a comprehensive study of SAR requirements in Vietnam. He pointed out that increased sortie rates; adverse operating conditions; and the lack of trained personnel made a professional SAR force mandatory. The study recommended that air rescue detachments be deployed to DaNang, Pleiku, Bien Hoa, and Can Tho. The study emphasized that the standard HH43 helicopter be modified for combat operations. These modifications included a longer hoist cable, self-sealing fuel tanks, and armor plating. Maj. Saunders forwarded his request to the 2nd AD/CC in Saigon.

7 November 63

2nd AD/CC, Major General Anthis approves and forwards Det. 3's request for HH-43's. During the following five months the 2nd Aid Divisions request bounced back and forth between MACV and CINCPAC. Part of the delay was that the U.S Army was sitting on the report because they felt that the Army's helicopters could handle SAR requirements, provided they made a few equipment modifications and instituted a training program. p.45#7

In the meantime, PACAF and ARS began the planning necessary to establish SAR coverage in Vietnam. P.15#1

March 64

HQ USAF approves transfer of three HH-43B detachments to SVN, with a planned deployment date of June 64. Action was taken to modify six HH-43B's on a priority basis. The contracts could not be let until approval was received to bring the helicopters into SVN. The time required to modify the helicopters meant that they would not be ready for deployment until October 64.

P.16#1

April 64

By April, the entire issue had yet to be resolved between CINCPAC and MACV. There were two principle reasons why the introduction of SAR forces was delayed. First, the United States involvement under the JUNGLE JIM and FARM GATE programs was semi-covert. SAR forces would emphasize United States participation. In order to keep the operation covert, very strict ceilings had been placed on manpower. When SAR forces were introduced in May 64, the ceilings had to be raised by 86 men. Second, there were conceptual differences between the Army and the Air Force during the period. The mission was eventually given to the Air Force by JCS directive. P16#1

Discuss current doctrine arguments AF v. Army (MH-47 air refuelable implication. Apache v. A-10 arguments)

In April, CINCPACAF, having funded and made the necessary plans for introducing SAR forces, made efforts to have the issue resolved. 13th Air Force was requested to seek information regarding MACV's intentions. CINCPAC was again reminded of the many valid reasons for an immediate deployment of the SAR forces. p. 16-17#1

May 64

In May 1964, the USAF began flying reconnaissance missions over the Panhandle to obtain target information on men and materiel being moved into South Vietnam over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. By this time, the footpaths had been enlarged to truck roads, with smaller paths for bicycles and walking. The Trail had become the major artery for use by North Vietnam to infiltrate South Vietnam.

When the Laotian coalition government established by the Geneva Conference of 1962, fell apart in 1964, the communist forces resumed the attack against Souvanna Phouma's Neutralist forces. In short order, the Pathet Lao had overrun their positions on the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ). The U.S. Government, anxious to bolster Neutralist forces and to demonstrate U.S. interest and determination in Laos, convinced Souvanna Phouma that aerial reconnaissance would prove to the world that the Pathet Lao was receiving help from China and North Vietnam. Thus reconnaissance flights; code named "YANKEE TEAM" began on 18 May 64.

This U.S. commitment created the need for a search and rescue capability in Laos. Initially, Air America was pressed into service. They were allegedly a privately owned airline. In actuality, Air America was owned and financed by the Central Intelligence Agency. Air America operated out of Thailand to support covert operations in Laos, and had provided limited SAR operations for Royal Laotian Air Force T-28's. The 2nd Air Division (AD) felt that Air America SAR forces would be inadequate to support "YANKEE TEAM" and on 29 May 1964, the 2nd AD commander asked PACAF for authority to employ U.S. aircraft and crews. No reply had been received when the first reconnaissance plane was shot down.

On 6 June 1964 had its first aircraft shot down in support of the war in SEA. Two USN RF-8A's were conducting a photo recon mission near the PDJ. The aircraft of Lt. Charles Klusmann was hit by ground fire and he ejected. His wingman immediately reported the shutdown on guard frequency and the message was relayed to the SARCC. The SARCC requested that Air America dispatch helicopters to Lt. Klusmann's rescue. Meanwhile an Air America C-123 Caribou intercepted the mayday and flew to the scene. They spotted Lt. Klusmann on the ground and guided two H-34's to the scene. As the first H-34 approached the downed crewmember it came under intense ground fire. One H-34 crewmember was wounded and both helicopters were forced to withdraw. At this point in time the rules of engagement did not permit RESCAP to be scrambled immediately. In fact the political situation in Laos was so sensitive that Ambassador

Unger had suggested that the YANKEE TEAM flights be curtailed. The on scene commander in the C-123 took it upon himself to request fighter support and t-28's scrambled from Vientiane. By the time they arrived, the weather precluded fixing the position of enemy forces and their efforts were ineffective.

In the meantime, CINCPACAF approved the use of U.S. aircraft for RESCAP. F-100's were scrambled from Takhli. The Navy also dispatched some fighters to the area. Shortly thereafter, these measures were revoked by CINCPAC; who further ordered that all U.S. forces be withdrawn from the SAR effort. This left the rescue up to Air America. They continued SAR until 8 June. The Pathet Lao had in fact captured Lt. Klusmann after the first helicopter had been driven off, some three hours after his bailout.

This unsuccessful SAR had thrown everyone into confusion. Important decisions had to be made quickly and it was uncertain as to who had the authority to make them. Communications were poor. The Air America helicopters did not have UHF radios to communicate with the fighters, nor did they have radio homing equipment to locate the downed pilot.

As a result of the 6 June shutdown, the recon flight on 7 June was escorted by

F-8B's. This fighter escort very quickly got an opportunity to carry out their mission. Commander D. W. Lynn was hit by ground fire and forced to eject. The ensuing SAR response was better coordinated. Commander Lynn was located by his beeper, and was picked up early on the morning of 8 June 1964.

Even though this SAR was successful, it again pointed out the limitations of Air America. Commander Lynn had evaded to a location on a wooded ridgeline at about 4800' elevation. At that altitude, the hover power of the H-34 is limited and Mr. Estes, the Air America pilot, was in danger of settling into the trees while hoisting the pilot into his aircraft. The situation was aggravated because the H-34 hoist cable was about 15' too short in the 120' high trees.

During the next few months, interim measures were worked out, using a 2nd AD plan as a foundation. Air America was to provide coverage in the PDJ during all YANKEE TEAM missions. The Deputy Commander, 2nd AD, Thailand, was made responsible for all USAF operations in Laos, including search and rescue. However, he was to act only at the request of and within the constraints imposed by the American Ambassador in Vientiane. p. 30-34#1

CINCPAC's approval for the introduction of USAF SAR forces was finally obtained in May 1964. The initial deployment of SAR forces was to have been made to DaNang, Bien Hoa, and Soc Trang. However, the demonstrated need for SAR forces to support YANKEE TEAM operations in Laos altered this decision. The first rescue helicopters to arrive in the theater of operations were placed on the Laotian border. The USAF moved two HH-43B's into Nakhon Phanom to provide SAR coverage within a 100-mile radius. To minimize deployment time, the 33rd ARS LBR unit at Naha, Okinawa was tasked. On 19 June 64, they were activated as Det 3 PARC (P). This interim force included 2 HH-43B's & 36 personnel. PJ's were not initially assigned to these units. Medical technicians from the base hospital flew on board. Two HU-16's were also assigned to Korat to perform airborne rescue command and control. They were on temporary duty from the 33 ARS, Naha, Okinawa.

Living conditions at NKP p.51#7

Discuss 1964 build up plan p.14-19#1 p.11-12#2

June 64

Korat, Thailand. 2 HU-16's TDY for airborne command and control of SAR's in Thailand and Laos.

Add role of HU-16 p.20#2

9 June 64

In the spring of 1964, Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese troops drove Laotian forces from the Plain of Jars. On Jun. 9, President Johnson ordered an F-100 strike against the enemy in retaliation for the loss of a U.S. airplane. These Plain of Jars operations, expanded by Dec. 1964, were code named "Barrel Roll" and were under the control of the U.S. ambassador to Laos who approved all targets before they were attacked.

July 64

31st ARS at Clark AB, Philippines sent 3 HU-16's to DaNang for rescue duties in the Gulf of Tonkin. P.50#7

33rd ARS sends 2 HU-16's to DaNang for rescue duty. P.59#7

As of 1 July 1964, there had been 143 fatalities resulting from crashes of U.S. aircraft in Vietnam. P14#1

2 August 64

North Vietnam carried out its first overt hostile action specifically against the United States on 2 August, 1964. Three of its Soviet-built torpedo boats allegedly fired torpedoes at the USS Maddox 28 miles off the North Vietnamese coast, in the Gulf of Tonkin. Two nights later, other attacks were reported against the Maddox and the USS C. Turner Jay.

5 August 64

President Johnson orders U.S. aircraft to bomb North Vietnamese torpedo boat bases and an oil storage depot. This is retaliation for the torpedo boat attacks on U.S. vessels in international waters.

6 August 64*

Capt. Philip Prince of LBR Det. At Maxwell AFB, ordered to have 2 HH-43B's on two C-124's for TDY deployment to Korat within 24 hours. P19#1

6 August 64

With six hours notice to deploy, the first PJ's receive TDY orders to SEA. Many of these PJ's were conducting survival training with Chuck Walther's in the woods of Eglin AFB when Earl Maples came out and told them they were being deployed to Vietnam. They were told to go home, pack a bag and wait for a call to come in. On August 7, they departed Eglin from the 48th Air Rescue Squadron with open TDY orders for 179 days. They flew out on a C-124 that also had an HH-43 on board. Every time they landed, Old Shakey broke down and they had to wait for repairs. They finally arrived at Korat on 14 August. During this TDY they served at bases all over

SEA. Primarily, they worked out of Bangkok, Tahkli, NPK, and DaNang. They flew missions on HH-43's and HU-16's.

They included Jim Watson, Art Cormier, Harry Birtel, and William Kelsay (plus others TBD). They were assigned TDY to Korat but also went TDY to DaNang to fly on the HU-16's. They departed Eglin AFB on a C-124 that also carried one HH-43. They appear to have spent 179 days TDY (explain 179 day rule). They came back in Dec 64 just before Christmas.

Birtel folder

7 August 64

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution approved by Congress authorizes President Johnson to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." The resolution has been approved 88 to 2 in the Senate and 416 to 0 in the House of Representatives. President Johnson orders retaliatory action after a second such alleged attack. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution also gave President Johnson authority to use all measures, including armed forces, to assist South Vietnam. It was then that the U.S. sent jet aircraft into South Vietnam for the first time.

Discuss incident. Validity & consequences.

14 August 64

TDY HH-43 LBR unit arrives Korat. Designated Det. 4 HQ PARC (P)

Started SAR operations. 6 month TDY (179 rule?)

HH-43 nicknamed "Pedro". Its combat radius of only 75 miles was increased by adding fuel drums strapped into the small cabin. Using this configuration HH-43's flew deep into North Vietnam. These relatively unsophisticated and defenseless helicopters accounted for more lives saved than any other rescue helicopter in the Vietnam War.

August 64

The frenzied force build-up that began after the Gulf of Tonkin incident placed demands on the Air Rescue Service. The Pacific Air Rescue Center did not have the resources to meet these demands, making it necessary to order stateside units to SEA on a temporary duty basis. In August 1964, the following CONUS LBR units were tasked to deploy to SEA:

Det 10, Eastern Air Rescue Center, Maxwell AFB Alabama

Det 1, Central Air Rescue Center, Glasgow AFB, Montana

Det 2, Central Air Rescue Center, Minot AFB, North Dakota

Det 4, Western Air Rescue Center, Paine AFB. Oregon

Det t, Western Air Rescue Center, McChord AFB, Washington

p.59#7

In late August 1964, President Johnson gave the American Ambassador to Laos, Leonard Unger, permission to use U.S. pilots in T-28's for rescue escort (RESCORT) on a case by case basis. The T-28, used by Det. 1, 1st Air Commando Wing was a beefed up version of an aging trainer.

These aircraft had good loiter capabilities and operated well at slow speeds while carrying up to 4,000 pounds of ordnance. Based at Udorn, the slow moving T-28's were especially well matched with the HH-43's operating out of NKP.

p.65#7

These T-28's were the forerunners of the A-1 Sandy's that would become an integral part of virtually every SAR mission in Vietnam. The foundations a basic SAR task force were now assembled.

Add in SAR taskforce concept p.62-63#7

Other RESCORT options p.65-66#7

September 1964:

DaNang, RVN. Pararescueman Jack Bennett is onboard an HH-43, southwest of Marble Mountain in the no man's land known as the "Arizona Territory." It is always hot, due to the large and entrenched concentrations of Viet Cong. The lumbering bird comes under accurate enemy ground fire; the pilot is slightly wounded. It is thought to be the first Rescue aircraft of the war to sustain battle damage. *Source = 50 years*

1 September 64

Det. 1, PARC (P) activated Bien Hoa. 2 HH-43B's

Det. 2, PARC (P) activated DaNang. 2 HH-43B's

Lt. Klusmann (shot down June 64) escapes from POW camp. Recovered by ? p.48#1

November 64

Det. 1, PARC (P) moves from Bien Hoa to Takhli.

Det. 2, PARC (P) moves from DaNang to Nakhon Phanom

Det. 4, PARC activated at Bien Hoa with the first three HH-43F's in SEA. PCS crews?

Det. 5, PARC activated at DaNang with two HH-43F's. PCS crews?

*Detachments 4 & 5 PARC equipped with new HH-43F. 3 assigned to each unit.

Explain differences HH-43B & F p. 20#1 p.60#7

**[USE YOUR BROWSERS BACK BUTTON TO MOVE BACK TO THE
PJs IN VIETNAM CHRONOLOGY PAGE](#)**