

1969

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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 The first U.S. troops departed in July and by the end of the year, 69,000 had been withdrawn.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 coastered. 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

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 1969

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 We] Is 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. *50 years*

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

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 freighter 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

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

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

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

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 September

16 June

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

July 1969

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

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*

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.

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

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

November 1969

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 Baskettt. *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-l'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*

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.

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