

1971

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1971

The U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam continued during 1971 and by December the USAF was down to 277 fighter and strike aircraft and 28,791 personnel from a 1968 high of 737 aircraft and 54,434 personnel. The VNAF was now responsible for 70% of all air combat operations. Enemy guerrilla activity continued to be sporadic.

Because of reported firings by North Vietnamese air defense units at USAF unarmed reconnaissance planes, Washington directed the USAF to strike back. From February through September, USAF fighter-bombers attacked SAM sites, enemy road construction through the DMZ, and oil-storage facilities. Most of these missions were into southern North Vietnam, leaving Hanoi to continue its build-up in the north. By late in the year, the North Vietnamese AF had about 250 MIG's which had become a significant threat to U.S. flyers. As a result, Washington authorized the USAF and Navy to bomb the three MIG airfields in southern North Vietnam and on November 7-8, the U.S. "neutralized" these three bases.

Because of significant stockpiling by North Vietnam in the Laotian Panhandle, South Vietnam launched a military thrust on February 8, 1971. Its goals were to cross into Laos and cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail to thwart a planned North Vietnamese offensive. Aerial support by the U.S., provided by the USAF, Army, Navy, and Marines, was massive. On February 25, North Vietnam launched a counterattack and in the face of heavy opposition, the South Vietnamese Army withdrew from Laos. However, because of its heavy losses, North Vietnam had to postpone its scheduled offensive into South Vietnam.

Later in the year, the USAF began "Commando Hunt VII" into southern Laos. With new technology such as laser-guided bombs, infrared sensors, and night-vision equipment, attacks could be made day and night, under almost any weather conditions. The operation began on November 1 with strikes at several entry points from North Vietnam into Laos. The next phase was against traffic moving down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Communist activity continued within Cambodia and eventually the road from the capital, Phnom Penh, to its seaport, Kompong Som was cut. Supplies then had to be flown in or carried on ships up the Mekong River from South Vietnam. USAF and U.S. Army aircraft provided aerial escort to river convoys and aerial support to ground operations of the Cambodian Army which nevertheless suffered repeated setbacks.

January 71

Five PJ's assigned to Bien Hoa are credited with saving the lives of two AF Sergeants who survive the crash of, and lie injured for six days near their downed C-123 Provider. Forty-four other people die. When the crash site is finally located, Det 1 37 ARRS PJ's William P. MacDonald, Robert T. Martin, Donald J. Pecoraro, James D. Scott, and Randy L. Zonker are inserted into the site where they administer emergency medical treatment to the two survivors before carrying them down a mountain to a waiting helicopter.

ARRS AOB p.113#7

28 March 71

Three of the PAVE IMP, Limited Night Recovery System (LNRS), modified HH-53's arrived at 40th ARRS Udorn. P23#3

17 May 71

Madden Kit utilization p32#3

24 May 71

Two additional PAVE IMP (LNRS) equipped HH-53's arrive at 40th ARRS. Total LNRS aircraft at Udorn now is 5. P23#3

30 June 71

38th ARRS at Tan Son Nhut deactivated. LBR units remaining in SEA become detachments of 3rd ARRGp.

1 July 71

Entire 38 ARRS managed all HH-43's in SEA, deactivated. All SEA LBR's become detachments under the 3rd ARRGp. P113#7

9 July 71

Final report of LNRS system published by 40th ARRS. p24#3

List findings

List 7 AF recommendations to remove from theater p24#3

List final decision p25#3

21 July 71

40th ARRS moves from Udorn RTAFT to NKP. P114#7

An HH-53, Jolly Green 54, is shot down while attempting to recover a drone which has landed in Laos. The Jolly was tasked as a single ship and was crewed by Major Clyde Bennet, pilot, Captain Butch Robins, co-pilot, J.D. Adams, FE and PJ's Jon Hoberg and Chuck McGrath. These unmanned drones were used to conduct photo reconnaissance of high threat areas in North Vietnam and Laos. They were supposed to return for landing in friendly territory. Now and then, one would land in enemy territory. Because of high technology classified material on the drone, we tried to recover them in areas that did not appear to be too dangerous. This drone had landed in a small clearing just north of the PDJ. The plan on this date was to swoop on in, lower a PJ by hoist to the drone, the PJ would attach a sling on the drone, then the PJ would attach the other end of the sling to the cargo hook on the hovering HH-53. Finally the PJ would be recovered by hoist and we would fly the drone back to friendly control. Jon Hoberg was the lucky PJ for this mission and would get to ride the hoist. This mission, like many others, would not go according to plan.

While in a hover over the drone, with Sergeant Hoberg about 30 feet below the HH-53 on the forest penetrator, Jolly 54 took ground fire and was shot down. As the doomed helicopter was going down, the pilots punched off the tip tanks in an effort to lighten the HH-53 and save it from crashing. When the helicopter hit the ground, it rolled over a couple of times and ended upside down against some trees on the down slope side of the clearing. Major Bennet, Captain Robbins, and Sergeant Adams ended up near the helicopter. Sergeants Hoberg and McGrath ended up near the center of the clearing near the drone. The only positive thing about this whole unfortunate affair was that the HH-53 did not explode into a fireball after it crashed. This factor would result in all members of the downed Jolly surviving the crash.

An Air America Huey was in the area and came to the crash site to begin rescue operations. It did not have a hoist, so it came to a low hover near the wounded FE Sergeant Adams. J.D. grabbed the Huey skid and the Huey pilot conducted a low hover taxi dragging the FE to the middle of the clearing near the two PJ's. Turned out that J.D. had ruptured some disks in his spine. Sergeant Hoberg had also been injured during the crash. He had been dropped to the ground while sitting on the penetrator, he had also been hit by one of the rotors during the crash. I started an IV on Jon.

We got the Adams on the Huey and then Hoberg. McGrath passed Hoberg's IV bottle up to someone in the Huey and then got in himself to treat his injured teammates while enroute back to a friendly base. The Huey was overloaded and McGrath had to get off. Once off the helicopter, it spot turns, comes close to giving Chuck a crewcut with the tail rotor, and then successfully exits the crash site. About ten minutes later, an Air America H-34 comes to a hover and lowers a horse collar down on the hoist. Major Bennet went up, then Captain Robbins, and finally Sergeant McGrath. This was not going to be Chuck's best day on this earth. When he is about ten feet off the ground the hoist cable breaks, and he finds himself back at the crash site, this time alone. While taking stock of his situation, Chuck hears periodic ground fire. About 10-15 minutes later another H-34 arrives on scene, lowers a horse collar and rescues our intrepid PJ. All the

helicopters recovered to Lima Site 54. When Sergeant McGrath arrives only Captain Robbins is still there. They both catch a ride back to Udorn on an Air America C-130. Upon arrival, they are ordered to the hospital where they spend one night in observation.

The next morning some A-1's were sent to Jolly 54's crash site to see if the drone or the HH-53 were recoverable. The A-1's were greeted with so much ground fire that they were ordered to destroy the Jolly and drone. The injured crewmembers Sergeants Adams and Hoberg are air evacuated for additional medical care. Major Bennet, Captain Adams and Sergeant McGrath are given a couple of days off, have a few beers at the Jolly Green Bar and are promptly put back into the flying schedule.

Jolly 54 folder

15 September 1971

HH-43 Pedro's become part of 40th ARRS

November 71

Det. 13, 3 ARRGp, Phu Cat deactivated. Their HH-43's reinforced Det. 14 3 ARRGp at Tan Son Nhut. P114#7

7th AF requests that twenty HH-53's be equipped with radar homing and warning equipment "RHAW" gear. P122#7

25 Nov 71

HH-53 shutdown. 37th ARRS A/C operating out of Bien Hoa FOL. 3 KIA, 1 MIA, 1 recovered by HH-43.

TECHNICAL SERGEANT JAMES R. THOMAS/AIRMAN FIRST CLASS THOMAS D. PROSE. Sergeant Thomas and Airman Prose are crewmembers on an HH53 from the 37th ARRS at DaNang AB, RVN. The crew is on an airborne alert orbit near Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, and is returning to base. Believing the area to be relatively benign, they are flying just above a lazy, meandering, rice paddy-flanked river. Suddenly, enemy ground fire erupts, impacting the cockpit area. The pilot is immediately killed. Since the huge helicopter is so close to the surface, there is no time for the copilot to react. The helicopter noses over and crashes into the river. A SAR is immediately initiated with an accompanying air armada of close air support aircraft, gunships, and other Jolly Greens. The search for survivors lasts for several days, and in the process, all bodies except Sergeant Thomas' is recovered. He is listed as killed in action/body not recovered.

A momento from the Vietnam Wall which is now displayed in the Museum of American History in Washington D.C. The unsigned handwritten note reads as follows: "fall 1971, 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery, Jolly Green Giants. Pararescuemen James Thomas and Thomas Prose were at Jolly Green FOL at Bien Hoa when they were scrambled to rescue the crew and PAX from a downed army Chinook in the Delta. After the successful recovery of the Army personnel to their base the HH-53 was returning to Bien Hoa, RVN when they were shot down and crashed and sank in the Na Be River. There were two survivors; PJ Rich Steed and FE Theriqux. The

helicopter was raised by Navy barge but the shackle broke and it fell back into the river with the bodies still in their gunner belts. Due to the VC activity they remain there to this date."

December 71

Charlie Horse 14 an Army Huey is downed 12 miles south of the DMZ. Rescued by Jolly Green 21 and 73

5 December 71

37th FOL at Bien Hoa (2 HH-53's) closed. This closure resulted in a decrease of 37th ARRS aircraft and aircrews. The number of HH-53's at the 37th DaNang stood at 8.

Det. 14 3 ARRGp, Tan Son Nhut, HH-43's begin daily rotations at Bien Hoa to provide local base rescue. P114#7

10 Dec 71

Ashcan 01 SAR p58-62#3

18 Dec 71

Falcon 74 SAR p63-66#3

Gunfighter 82 SAR see folder for details

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PJs IN VIETNAM CHRONOLOGY PAGE**