



# PTEROGRAM

*The Official Publication of the Ancient Order of The Pterodactyl (AOP)  
(In the dinosaur age, pterodactyls plucked creatures from the sea as have we.)*

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### **A Story of Skill and Valor by U.S. Coast Guard Aviators and Others who Heroically Performed Hazardous Combat Rescue and Recovery Duties in Southeast Asia**

United States Coast Guard aviation dates from 1916. USCG aviation personnel have recorded many firsts. A few include piloting the very first transatlantic crossing by air, performing the very first helicopter rescue mission, pioneering ocean seaplane rescues and rotary wing development, and establishing a variety of speed, distance and aerial rescue records.

The Ancient Order of the Pterodactyl, an all volunteer non profit association, was founded in 1977. The primary objectives of the organization are to preserve and promote the rich history of United States Coast Guard Aviation.

Awards for current active duty Coast Guard aviation personnel are sponsored annually by the AOP in categories of flight safety, fixed and rotary wing rescue, and aviation maintenance. Financial support is rendered to museums featuring Coast Guard aviation exhibits. Encouragement and research support is provided to authors of books featuring Coast Guard aviation aircraft, personnel and accomplishments. Other grants and activities are aimed at supporting primary organizational goals.

Our website ([www.AOPtero.org](http://www.AOPtero.org)) includes details on programs and internet links to extensive Coast Guard aviation history.

An annual membership gathering fosters comraderie and provides for award presentations.

By publishing this special edition presenting the work of one of our diligent and talented members, we hope to see his story widely read and appreciated by the American people. In addition to normal membership mailing, we are printing extra copies for distribution to other periodicals, military and commercial. We invite our members and others to consider purchasing additional copies to donate, for example, to schools, public libraries, etc. An order form is on page 23.

These tales are true. These characters are real. This story, we fervently believe, is of exceptional worth in describing graphic examples of aerial expertise and valiant humanitarian effort by brave Americans.





# U.S. Coast Guard Aviation in Vietnam

## Combat Rescue and Recovery

by John "Bear" Moseley, U.S. Coast Guard Aviator 743



## Foreword

**The Vietnam War took place against a background of a culturally fragmented society. It was a time of confusion, conflicting emotions and feelings leaving the country divided. Those veterans returning from the war were in most cases treated with disinterest and, in some cases, disdain. Perhaps this is the reason the Coast Guard did not meaningfully acknowledge the exploits of those aviators who flew with the U.S. Air Force Rescue Squadrons in Vietnam. The returning aviators reported to their new duty assignments and were received as if the previous tour had been a routine transfer.**

**Today is a different time with a different climate. There are many that would be interested in the exploits of these men. There are others who wish to recognize their outstanding accomplishments. They wrote a memorable chapter in the history of the Coast Guard. They willfully placed themselves in harms way and have known the innermost feeling of satisfaction that comes from knowing that others lived because of what they did.**

**Their performance brought great honor upon themselves, Coast Guard Aviation, and the United States Coast Guard.**

## Introduction

This is the story of those U. S. Coast Guard aviators who flew as part of the U.S. Air Force Combat Rescue Forces during the Vietnamese Conflict. The men who wrote this virtually unknown chapter of Coast Guard aviation history exemplified the highest traditions of Coast Guard Aviation and the United States Coast Guard.

General Howell M. Estes, Jr., USAF, Commander, Military Airlift Command, parent command of the Air Rescue and Recovery Service, made the following statement about these Coast Guard aviators:

“I am personally aware of the distinguished record achieved by the pilots flying in combat with our Jolly Greens. They have flown many difficult and challenging missions and have consistently demonstrated their unreserved adherence to both our mottoes — Always Ready and That Others May Live — they are indelibly inscribed in the permanent records of the stirring and moving drama of combat aircrew recovery in Southeast Asia.”

## Vietnam

The Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered search and rescue forces sent to Southeast Asia in May of 1964. The primary responsibility was given to the US Air Force. When the first units of the Air Rescue Service arrived with the short-ranged HH-43B helicopters, they were not prepared for the unique challenges of combat aircrew recovery in the jungles and mountains of Vietnam and Laos.<sup>1</sup>

This deficiency was directly attributable to the draw-down of forces which took place in the late 1950's. The concept during this period was one of massive nuclear retaliation. Consequently, the Air Force committed itself only to a peacetime search and rescue capability. Helicopters were assigned to individual Air Force bases founded on a study that determined that almost all accidents occurred within a 75-mile radius of the base of operations. Each base had a local base rescue detachment consisting of two or sometimes three helicopters.<sup>2</sup> By the end of 1960, the Air Rescue Service (ARS) consisted of three squadrons and 1,450 personnel.<sup>3</sup>

During July 1964, three HU-16E fixed-wing

amphibians from the 31<sup>st</sup> ARS and two from the 33<sup>rd</sup> ARS were assigned temporary additional duty at Da Nang, South Vietnam. They were used as mission control aircraft and for at sea rescues of downed flyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. By the end of 1964, air rescue forces had established four detachments, two in the Republic of Vietnam and two in Thailand.<sup>4</sup>

Still manned and equipped for a peacetime operation, the Air Rescue Service was struggling to catch up. By June of 1965, four-engine WW II-era transport HC-54s assumed interim duties as rescue control aircraft. They were later replaced by HC-130s. In August 1965, A-1 Skyraiders began escorting rescue helicopters. In October the first of the HH-3Es arrived. These aircraft had a rescue hoist, drop tanks that increased range, armament, and more powerful engines than previous helicopters. Of significant importance was the titanium armor added to the HH-3s to protect the crew and critical helicopter components. At the end of the year, the Air Rescue Service inventory in Southeast Asia was six HH-3Es, one CH-3C, 25 HH-43B/Fs, five HU-16Es, and two HC-54s.<sup>5</sup>

## Jolly Greens

On 8 January 1966, the Air Rescue Service became the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS), and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group (ARRG) took charge of all rescue operations in Vietnam.

Improved tactics were instituted and better equipment came into being. In-flight refueling of the HH-3Es, utilizing HC-130Ps as refuelers, became operational in June of 1967. However, due to demonstrated ambivalence toward the helicopter, the Air Force requirement for the HH-3E had not been scheduled into production. As a result, the needed aircraft were not obtained until the first quarter of 1968. The HU-16s, to be replaced by the HH-3Es, were not phased out until the fall of 1967.



The HH-3Es were called “Jolly Green Giants.” The name derived from the size of the helicopter and the green camouflage-paint scheme. Not only did this naming system provide the rescue controller with information as to the type helicopter and the capabilities available to him but the name “Jolly Greens” would come to identify and reflect the proud heritage of these rescue forces.



*HH-3E “Jolly Green” in distinctive camouflage detail*

## Coast Guard Aviators

The first group of HH-3Es, stationed at Udorn, Thailand, was under the command of Air Force Major Baylor R. Haynes. Former Air Force First Lieutenant John Guilmartin, who deployed with the group, stated there were no written directives, no tactics, no rules of engagement, and no concept of combat rescue operations on the part of the Air Rescue Service.<sup>6</sup>

Things improved, but the rapid increase in rescue requirements generated by direct involvement of U.S. forces created an acute shortage of experienced HU-16 and helicopter pilots. The Air Force approached the

Coast Guard for supplemental help at the beginning of 1966. An aviator exchange program was suggested.<sup>7</sup> However, it was not until March 1967 that the Coast Guard agreed on an implementing memorandum of agreement.

Orders were cut for the initial group of Coast Guard aviators under the Coast Guard/Air Force Aviator Exchange Program in July of 1967.<sup>9</sup> From the volunteer pool of more than 80, two fixed wing and three helicopter aviators were selected.

The fixed wing aviators, both HU-16E qualified, were Lieutenant Thomas F. Frischmann and Lieutenant James C. Quinn. Because the HU-16E was being phased out, both received orders to attend the Advanced Flying Course (C-130B/E) at Sewart Air Force Base and upon completion, to attend the Advanced Flying Course (HC-130P) at Eglin AFB. This completed, they received orders to report to the 31<sup>st</sup> ARRS, Clark AFB, Republic of the Philippines, arriving 3 June 1968.



*LT Tom Frischman at the controls of an HC-130P during a refueling mission*

The missions constituted a series of rescue orbits over the South China Sea, escorts, medevacs, searches, intercepts, and deployments to other bases. Quinn requested a transfer to the 39<sup>th</sup> ARRS, based at Tuy Hoa in the fall of 1968. This was approved in early 1969.<sup>10</sup>

The first of the group of helicopter pilots selected were Lieutenant Commander Lonnie L. Mixon, Lieutenant Lance A. Eagan, and Lieutenant Jack C. Rittichier. They were assigned to the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS at Da Nang for combat rescue duty. In preparing for this assignment, they attended the Air Force Survival School at Fairchild AFB, Washington. This was followed by training in the HH-3E twin-engine amphibious helicopter at Sheppard AFB, Texas. They received advanced combat crew training beginning in January at Eglin AFB, Florida. This was followed by high-altitude helicopter flying in

the mountains near Francis Warren AFB, Wyoming and jungle survival training at Clark AFB in the Philippines. The trio arrived in Da Nang on 3 April 1968.<sup>11</sup>



*L to R: LT Jack Rittichier, LT Lance Eagan, and LCDR Lonnie Mixon at Frances Warren AFB, Wyoming*

Lieutenant Richard V. Butchka, Lieutenant James M. Loomis, and Lieutenant (jg) Robert T. Ritchie followed in April 1969 replacing for the first group. Lieutenant Commander Joseph L. Crowe and Lieutenant Roderick Martin III arrived in 1971, and following in 1972 were Lieutenant Jack Stice and Lieutenant Robert E. Long. All these aviators were helicopter qualified and were assigned to the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS at Da Nang.

Butchka, Loomis, and Ritchie were at Da Nang flying with the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS. In order to identify each other in flight on missions, Loomis came up with a system. Quinn was "Coast Guard 1," Butchka "Coast Guard 2," Loomis "Coast Guard 3," and Ritchie "Coast Guard 4." Quinn later stated, "This was well received at the squadron level, but a few of the Colonels were not terribly impressed with our humor and thought we were nuts — but I convinced my crowd that I had them surrounded."

In the Air Force qualification-system, a pilot begins as a copilot and by means of training and experience becomes a qualified aircraft commander. The next step up is designation as instructor pilot, a pilot qualified to train others. Top qualification is flight examiner. The Coast Guard aviators arrived as fully qualified aircraft commanders and all had extensive helicopter flight time — most in the HH-52A with characteristics

similar to the HH-3E. As a result of this experience, all were designated Air Force instructor pilots and were used extensively to train newly arriving Air Force pilots. Butchka was designated as a flight examiner.

Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Charles R. Klinkert, the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS Commander, said in October 1968, "The Coast Guard Aviators have been a terrific assist to the Air Force. Very few of us had any experience in this helicopter. These gentlemen came in here and helped us become real effective in this type of mission. I can't say enough about them."<sup>19</sup>

Master Sergeant Jack Watkins put it another way. "The crews liked to fly with the Coast Guard pilots. It went beyond personalities. The Coasties were all experienced and excellent helicopter pilots and when on a mission they were able to readily adapt to any situation. Flying the helicopter was natural to them. Their "saves" were duly recorded. What really cannot be determined is — how many of us made it through our tour due to the willingness of Mr. Mixon and Mr. Eagan to pass along their skills to the other pilots."

The praise was not just at the local level. The Commander 3<sup>rd</sup> ARR Group wrote a letter to the Coast Guard Commandant praising the Coast Guard aviators for their courage and flying ability. Additionally the letter noted the extensive work the Coast Guard officers had performed in developing highly proficient crews. Furthermore, Mixon was cited for developing improved water-recovery tactics and procedures for medical evacuations from surface vessels, uncommon experiences for Air Force pilots.

Colonel Klinkert's statement on effectiveness was correct. The Jolly Greens became the best at what they did. The small Air Force group began with little experience, but of necessity, they learned fast, and they learned well. No one can question their courage and dedication to the mission. Some Air Force pilots returned for their second and third combat tours, and the enlisted crews were almost all multi-tour vets by 1972.

Colonel Frank Buzze who flew F-100s in the war, wrote the following:

"They were called Jolly Greens with near reverence by U.S. combat pilots. Jet pilots are a pretty individualistic lot and will argue about almost anything, but a sure way to start something [was] for someone to bad-mouth the Jollys. No one did."

The Coast Guard aviators were fiercely proud to be part of the Jolly Greens. The Air Force treated them as their own. They were called "Coasties." The term was one of respect. Mixon said they wished to retain their Coast Guard identity but while doing so also wished to ensure that the Air Force knew they were fully committed to the squadron and the mission. They did both quite

well. They purposely wore their khaki garrison caps with their rank displayed on one side and the Coast Guard Eagle on the other. They lived and breathed helicopters and were well received, sometimes with bemusement, by their Air Force counterparts. These men, and the ones who came after them, possessed a deep-seated belief that no one was better prepared and qualified to fly rescue helicopters than Coast Guard aviators.



*RADM Ben Engel, Commander 14th CG District,,  
LCDR Lonnie Mixon, USCG (Ctr) and  
RADM Fishburn, USPHS (CG) during a Da Nang visit*

The Coasties had a little fun with being unique within a unique organization. They created special squadron patches with the Coast Guard stripe and insignia. Butchka, Loomis, and Ritchie carried on the tradition when they sent Christmas Cards from "Coast Guard Air Station Da Nang." The Air Force people joined in the little tongue-in-cheek exercise. When Stice and Long arrived at Da Nang in 1972, they were greeted with the following welcome written in the squadron newsletter under the heading "Coast Guard Air Station Da Nang."

"They say they are not 2<sup>nd</sup> Lts. or 1<sup>st</sup> Lts. but full lieutenants (whatever that means). How did they do it? Well Jack and Bobby didn't have any MAC [Military Airlift Command] regulations to prevent it. They didn't even fill out a DOD or an AF form. Luckily the 3rd Group inspection team did not get hold of them. Due to the lack of records, forms, and regulations, we can only assume they are qualified."

The second group of Coast Guard aviators arrived in April of 1969. Their arrival and the fact that they were all qualified aircraft commanders was gratefully noted in the unit's historical record. Shortly after arrival,

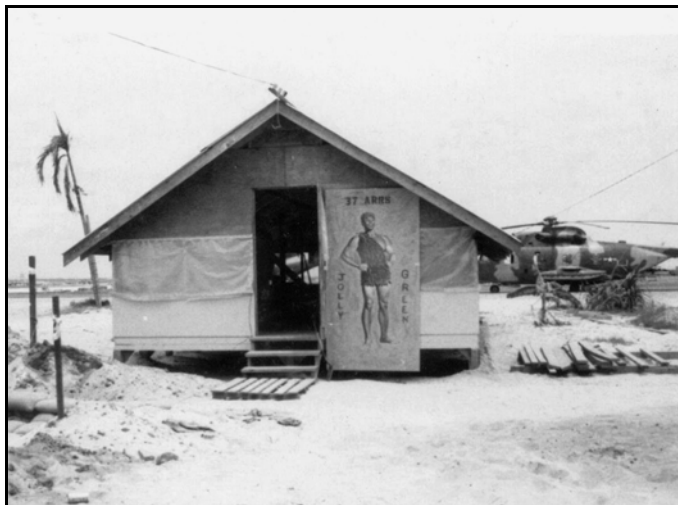
Lieutenant James M. Loomis flew back-to-back “Coast Guard type” missions. On two separate occasions in less than three days, Loomis and his crew evacuated personnel who had been injured at sea. Each mission traveled almost one thousand miles over water. Using in-flight refueling, each operation was accomplished non-stop, taking eight hours. Furthermore, the flights were conducted at night. At the time, they were the longest over-water medivacs [Medical Evacuations] ever accomplished by helicopter. Comments by Butchka, Crowe and Stice, confirmed by entries in the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS SAR Log, indicate that operations involving naval surface vessels was a “Coastie” operation. This would continue through to the cessation of hostilities.

## Air Force Squadrons

The 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS initially had 14 HH-3Es assigned. The squadron was authorized 21 pilots and 21 copilots but rarely would have more than 70 to 80-percent of that number attached. Only 25-percent of the replacement pilots were qualified as aircraft commander. Obtaining experienced helicopter pilots was a problem for the Air Force shortly after initial deployment. The situation was further impacted with the formation of the 20<sup>th</sup> Helicopter Squadron in October 1965 and the 21<sup>st</sup> Helicopter Squadron in 1967. These squadrons, part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Wing, operated out of NKP [Nakhon Phanom, Thailand] and performed counter-insurgency missions and mission support in a Central Intelligence Agency operation in Laos. This operation, called *Pony Express*, further depleted the supply of experienced helicopter pilots available to the ARRS. The Air Force met these requirements by transitioning fixed-wing pilots to helicopters. These pilots arrived in Southeast Asia directly from helicopter training. The Coast Guard aviators — well-experienced helicopter pilots — arrived fully qualified. Though often junior in rank, the Coast Guard officers found themselves flying with a major or Lieutenant Colonel as a copilot, but the rank disparity never interfered with the mission.

The daily mission commitment had two HC-130Ps out of Tuy Hoa providing continuous coverage at two holding points, one over the Gulf of Tonkin and another over Laos. The 37<sup>th</sup> AARS would place one or two HH-3Es orbiting over the Gulf of Tonkin, two HH-3Es on strip alert at Da Nang, and two deployed at Quang Tri which was nearer the North Vietnamese border. The holding patterns and strip alert at Quang Tri shortened response time. If rescue forces could get to a downed airman within 35 minutes, the rescue probability was good. After that, success fell off rapidly. Quang Tri was a U.S. Marine Corps. compound where the pilots had their own shelter, referred to as the “alert shack.” It had a floor,

cots, several chairs, and a VHF-FM radio. Toilet facilities were external.



*Quang Tri Alert Shack*



*LCDR Lonnie Mixon on alert duty at Quang Tri*

## Rescue Mission Tactics

As tactics evolved, in good part due to efforts of Haynes, the rescue task force known as STARF came into being. Basically, STARF had a controlling aircraft such as the HC-130P, helicopters for downed airmen recovery, and fixed wing aircraft for protection and ground fire suppression. HC-130Ps (call signs “Crown” and later “King”) were used to coordinate the rescue effort and provide in-flight refueling for the helicopters. For most of the war, the A-1 Skyraider gave fire support to the helicopters. This was a powerful, reciprocating-engine aircraft with massive firepower, durability, slow

speed, and loiter capabilities that made it an excellent aircraft for close air support. No amount of system analysis or staff studies will ever convince the men who were fighting the day-to-day war that the A-1 was not the right plane, in the right place, at the right time.

The A-1s, based at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, had the call sign "Sandy" and those at Pleiku and Da Nang used



*It was dirty and oil streaked, but to a downed airman it was beautiful. The distinct sound of the R3350 reciprocating engine swinging that big propeller meant the "Jolly Greens" were on the way!*

the call sign "Spad."

On a typical rescue, tactics called for four A-1s and two helicopters, HH-3Es or CH-53B/Cs. The A-1s divided into two flights, Sandy low and Sandy high. The Jolly Greens and Sandy high went into orbit while Sandy low assessed the situation. One of the Sandy low pilots became on-scene commander with the job of locating the survivor, determining his condition, assessing the landscape, and seeking enemy presence. When conditions seemed best, he directed a helicopter in for pick up. This helicopter, designated low bird, swooped in escorted by Sandy high. The other helicopter, high bird, stayed ready to rescue the low bird crew if they ended up on the ground. Depending on the factors involved, fighter escorts referred to as "fast movers" were used as combat air patrol against MiG enemy fighters.<sup>8</sup> Few rescues in enemy controlled territory were accomplished without opposition. The enemy knew a rescue attempt would be made and developed tactics to ambush the rescuers.

## Rescues Begin

It did not take long for the Coast Guard aviators to become fully involved. Eleven days after arrival, Rit-tichier, in the face of hostile ground fire, participated in the rescue of the crewmembers of two U.S. Army helicopter gunships that had been shot down. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Air Assault into the A Shau Valley had begun. [The A Shau Valley was one of the strategic focal points of the war in Vietnam. Located in western Thua Thien province, the narrow 25-mile long valley was an arm of the Ho Chi Minh Trail funneling troops and supplies toward Hué and Da Nang. At the north end of the valley was the major North Vietnamese Army (NVA) staging area known as Base Area 611. Because of its importance to the North Vietnamese plan for victory, the A Shau became a major battleground from the earliest days of the American involvement in Vietnam.]

The downed Army aviators made contact with the controlling C-130 circling overhead and gave their positions. A-1 Sandies and Jolly Greens were called in. Army Warrant Officer Chuck Germeck, one of the rescued aviators, relates the rest of the action as follows:

"When the A-1s arrived, we directed their fire at the Vietcong (VC) positions and starting searching for an area where Jolly Greens could get to us. The Jolly Greens came on station, and we were directed to a small clearing just down from the top of the hill. As the first Jolly Green came in, I heard heavy fire from the VC positions, and he had to pull out. As I recall, he made repeated attempts to hover over us but at some point had to leave station. The A-1s came in for more runs against the VC positions. Then helicopter gunships from HHB and "A" Battery of the 2/20th ARA arrived. They hit the areas around us pretty hard as we directed them to VC positions using our emergency radios. Another flight of Jolly Greens arrived on station, and they came in to pick us up as the gunships provided cover. My crew was the first to be pulled up the hoist. They took two of us at a time, my crew chief and gunner first, and then myself and Warrant Officer Raymond. The second Jolly Green came in and pulled out Captain Mill's crew. As the Jolly Greens circled the area, I saw Air Force jets hit the hill with napalm. At Da Nang we were treated to a fine steak dinner, with ice cream for dessert. Not bad for us 1<sup>st</sup> Cav guys who were used to eating C rations for breakfast, lunch and dinner. After the customary handshakes and thank you's, aircraft from 2/20th flew us back to LZ [landing zone] Sharon at Quang Tri. We arrived just in time to attend our own memorial service."

The next week brought two more combat missions, and

on 12 May, Rittichier twice entered an extremely hostile area to rescue nine survivors of a downed helo, five of whom were seriously wounded. The survivors were located in a very small landing zone, surrounded by tall trees, on the side of a steep mountain slope. Rittichier made the approach and departure in darkness aided by flare light.<sup>12</sup>



*LT Rittichier and crew after pickup of downed F-100 crew.  
Front: Sgt. Gunan, PJ, Sgt. Beland, FE, USAF*

On 6 June, Mixon, with Air Force Captain William Byrd as copilot, rescued a downed A-1 pilot from atop a 5,200-foot mountain 15 miles northwest of Khe Sanh. This operation is particularly noteworthy because the hovering performance of a helicopter falls off appreciably at high altitudes, especially when compounded by the hot humid weather that prevails in South Vietnam during June. With a C-130 tanker circling nearby, Mixon dumped fuel to reduce his weight to a minimum. From helicopter performance charts, the power available vs. power required to hover read: "hover not possible." Mixon thought it could be done. He made his approach high enough so that he could come down the mountain to pick up translational lift [lift of a helicopter rotor system aided by forward movement] if he was unable to maintain a hover. The helicopter arrived over the downed airman and the Jolly Green was able to maintain altitude while the forest penetrator was lowered and the survivor hoisted to safety. Mixon departed as soon as the penetrator was clear of treetops. He then refueled from the HC-130P tanker that had been orbiting above him and returned to Da Nang. This is purported to be the highest rescue by a HH-3E helicopter.<sup>13</sup>



*L to R: Sgt. Stanaland,, PJ, Sgt Beland, FE, USAF,  
LCDR Mixon,pilot, USCG, Capt. Byrd, copilot, USAF  
After rescuing A-1 pilot from atop a 5,200 foot mountain*

### **Jolly Green 23**

Three days later tragedy struck. Hellbourne 215, a Marine Corps A-4 crashed northwest of the A Shau Valley. The downed aviator was located with his parachute a few yards from a road oriented east-west with a steep hill overlooking his position. Trail 36, the forward air controller (FAC), who had been in contact with Hellbourne 215, reported that the downed airman had a broken leg and a possible broken arm and would probably require a PJ rescue specialist to assist him [highly skilled Air Rescue Service PJs were trained to deploy by parachute or from helicopters]. Numerous suppression strikes by Spads and A-4 aircraft had been directed into the area to keep the strong enemy forces away from the Marine pilot. The first HH-3E to attempt the pick up, Jolly 22, commanded by Major Art Anderson, made three approaches. Intense fire suppression activity followed every approach. Each time, extremely heavy enemy ground-fire drove the helicopter away. After the third approach, Jolly 22 had to depart critically low on fuel, leaving Lieutenant Jack Rittichier, piloting high bird, as the only rescue helicopter on scene. Trail 36 asked Rittichier if he would be able to make the rescue attempt. Rittichier answered in the affirmative and requested Scarface, helicopter-gunships, and A-1s to suppress ground fire as he went in. Enemy gunfire became so intense that he could not maintain his hover and had to pull away.

The Spads poured on more suppressing fire. Rittichier, after determining his aircraft was okay, returned for a second try. Trail 33 led in him along with two gunships and two Spads for cover. Throughout the approach,



Rittichier relayed the direction of incoming fire until coming to a hover over the downed pilot.

Bob Dubois, pilot of Trail 33, watching the event later wrote the following:

“Jolly Green 23 went into a hover over the A-4 pilot and turned to the west. The PJ was on the wire being lowered when Jolly Green 23 reported he was taking heavy fire. I saw fire coming out of the left side near the engine and I told him he was on fire and to get out of there. He started to pull out and I advised him that there was a clearing 1000 meters north if he had to set down. He said he was going for the clearing. He was in descent but still above the height of the trees along the edge of the clearing when the main rotor stopped turning. Jolly Green 23 hit the ground and burst into flames that consumed anything that looked like an aircraft.”<sup>14</sup>

Lieutenant Jack Rittichier and his crew were lost with the aircraft.

## Helicopter Rescues

In Vietnam, two major obstacles in the recovery of downed pilots faced the rescue pilot.

First was the inability of the helicopter to land near the victims on the ground. Jungle trees formed a triple canopy rising up to 200 feet above the tangled bush. Terrain features included karst [a limestone region marked by sinks, abrupt ridges, irregular protuberant rocks, and underground streams], mountains and swamps. To reach survivors on the ground from a helicopter hovering above the jungle canopy, a forest penetrator was developed. This plumb-bob like device attached to the end of the hoist cable and when unfolded became a seat. Folded, it snaked the hoist cable down through thick foliage. Additionally, the PJ rescuer could ride it down to the ground from the helicopter to offer aid in extracting the downed airman.

The second problem was enemy opposition through effective firepower. With Soviet help, the North Vietnamese constructed one of the best-integrated air-defense systems in the world. This included MiG fighter interceptors, SA-2 surface to air guided missiles, and a stable of anti-aircraft guns from 23mm to radar directed 100mm weapons. The North Vietnamese shrewdly did not challenge U.S. air superiority. Instead, they concentrated on achieving “air deniability,” that is, denying use of airspace in specific locations.

Throughout the war, 23mm, 37mm, and 57mm weapons, working in combination with heavy machine-guns, were placed in areas with large numbers of combatants.

These mobile weapons could be readily moved from location to location. A rescue helicopter flew at a slow speed and a low altitude so these weapons posed an eminent threat. Red dots on charts carried by helicopter crews showed where these guns were known to be. Some areas on these charts were solid red. If a pilot could fly his crippled aircraft to an isolated jungle area, or if he could head out over the Gulf of Tonkin, chance of rescue increased. Isolated jungle areas designated as SAFE areas (Selected Area For Evasion) were much better than those infested with enemy troops like, for example, the Ho Chi Minh Trail.<sup>15</sup>



*PJ about to be hoisted up with injured man. This was the most vulnerable time for the helicopter. On many missions the North Vietnamese would wait for this moment and direct maximum firepower at the Jolly Green.*

## Scotch 3

On 1 July Scotch 3, a F-105, Thunderchief, was hit. Lieutenant Colonel Jack Modica thought he could stay airborne long enough to reach the Gulf. This did not prove to be the case, and he was forced to eject just north of Dong Hoi. A second pilot in the vicinity saw the parachute and noted the approximate position as Modica disappeared into the North Vietnamese jungle. It was a low-level ejection and when he hit the ground, he was knocked unconscious. It was two hours later that

he radioed the overhead FAC reporting his condition. The time delay had given the North Vietnamese time to reach his location. To compound matters, he reported that something had happened to his back and he couldn't move.

The first Jolly Green to go in was driven away several times and had to leave because of low fuel. Lieutenant Commander Lonnie L. Mixon was next to try. The Sandies went in with suppression fire but Mixon soon learned it had little effect. The North Vietnamese hit his aircraft with ground fire, damaging a fuel tank, rupturing a hydraulic line and knocking out part of the electrical system. He pulled off, and the Sandies went back in with more suppressing fire.

Darkness was near but the rescuers decided to try one more time. Mixon told the on scene commander that his helicopter was still flyable and that he would go in and make the attempt. He started his approach to the downed aviator as tracers sparkled in the twilight. The helo was hit repeatedly. Mixon finally had to break off the attempt. Modica, having hid himself the best he could, would spend the night on the ground.<sup>16</sup>

The next morning the Jollies tried again but it didn't go well. An A-1 was shot down, killing the pilot, and a badly shot up HH-3E returned to Da Nang with an unexploded rocket lodged in the belly. The rocket penetrated a fuel cell. Rescue forces were recalled from the costly attempt. Several hours later, after a B-52 bomber strike close to the scene, a decision was made to make another attempt.

Jolly 21 was low bird. The crew, Coast Guard Lieutenant Lance A. Eagan, aircraft commander, Air Force Major Bob Booth, copilot, Sergeant Herb Honer, flight engineer, and Airman First Class Joel Talley, PJ, knew it was going to be a rough one. They would have to penetrate a well established "flak-trap" in order to make the pick up. Eagan descended through very heavy 37mm anti-aircraft fire using twisting evasive-maneuvers.

The aircraft took several hits, and the concussion from airbursts staggered the helicopter. Then the helicopter was through and into a box canyon with the crew peering for Scotch 3 through the jungle canopy. Eagan made radio contact with Scotch 3 and could see the signal smoke the downed airman was sending up, but due to the extremely dense jungle, it was impossible to see the man.

Modica was unable to help by moving to an opening beneath the helicopter, which made it necessary to send the PJ down on the penetrator. Eagan spotted a small opening in the jungle cover near Modica's smoke, and Talley was lowered. Once on the ground, Talley looked up at the flight engineer who pointed in Modica's direction. The undergrowth was so dense it took Talley a good bit of time to find the man. He determined

Modica's pelvis was broken.

Talley used his radio to vector the helicopter over his position. Moving over the victim and rescuer on the ground, Eagan found himself in a small valley with trees and hills surrounding him on three sides rising 200 feet above his hovering helicopter. There was no hostile fire directed at Jolly 21 at this time but Eagan knew the North Vietnamese would zero in on the smoke. He had to get to Talley and Modica quickly and bring them up. With the helicopter's height above the terrain limited by the length of the hoist cable (250 feet), he edged ever closer to Talley's position. The rotor blades lopped through trees tops as he eased forward, until stopped by a towering dominant-tree under which lay the injured pilot. The penetrator was dropped close by and Talley carried the pilot the short distance. By this time, Talley had been on the ground for 18 minutes. He strapped himself and the injured pilot onto the penetrator then pushed his radio switch to call for the hoist to begin. Eagan heard Talley say, "Take us up."

The flight engineer began hoisting, and at that instant Eagan caught sight of movement in the jungle ahead. The whole world seemed to erupt. The enemy, waiting for the moment of vulnerability, sprang the trap. Intense automatic-weapons fire came from below and in front of the helicopter. Hostile fire punctured the windshield spraying powdered Plexiglas all over him, but Eagan could not move the helicopter until the PJ and rescued pilot cleared the treetops. It seemed like an eternity before he heard a shout from the back that Modica and Talley were clear of the trees. Without hesitation, Eagan pulled the damaged aircraft away, with the PJ and injured pilot swaying below. He turned the helicopter to shield them from the ground fire. Once everyone was on board, he flew direct to the field hospital at Dong Ha.

On the ground at Dong Ha, Eagan and his crew checked their Jolly. The titanium armor plating and luck had saved them. The intensity of the fire showed in their battle damage. The helicopter had taken direct hits from large caliber automatic weapons. A total of 40 bullet holes were counted in the fuselage. The tail section had a gaping hole. Four of the five rotor blades had been hit. And the self sealing fuel tank had nine punctures. Eagan had missed being killed or wounded by a matter of inches, and the copilot was saved by the titanium plating under his seat. The Jolly Green was deemed unflyable and was transported back to Da Nang slung beneath a CH-54B Skycrane helicopter. The rescued pilot, Lieutenant Colonel Jack Modica said, "I've heard of the incredible jobs done by the rescue forces and now I'm convinced of it."<sup>17</sup>

*See next page for photo of the CH-54B Skycrane airlifting Jolly 21, LT Lance Eagan's unflyable helicopter from Donh Ha to Da Nang.*



*Eagan's Jolly 21*

## Carrot Top

Not all rescue operations were downed airmen. The Jolly Greens were called upon by the Army to extract a special forces team, call sign Carrot Top, which had come under heavy fire in the A Shau Valley in Laos. On scene Spads, A-1s out of Pleiku, that had been conducting suppressive fire, briefed Jolly 10 and Jolly 28, but due to a stratus cloud deck 1,000 feet directly above the Landing Zone (LZ), success was questionable. Two Army UH-1F helicopter gunships were also on scene, and when the ground party reported a pause in ground fire, Lieutenant Commander Lonnie L. Mixon, in Jolly 28, with the gunships as escort, made the first rescue attempt.

The reconnaissance team was half way up the mountainside in a small clearing on a 2000-foot cliff face. Because of the sheer, rocky walls, there was only one way in and out of the canyon. Mixon came to an abrupt hover 10 feet over the center of the shallow, elephant grass covered LZ. Near the rock wall ahead and to the left, several men waited alongside the bright orange fabric on the ground that they carried for pinpointing their retrieval location. Mixon pivoted the aircraft to face his exit route. The helicopter covered three quarters of the diameter of the small circular clearing. As the turn was

being completed, a second group stood erect above the tall grass and began firing automatic weapons into the left side of the aircraft. The PJ in the back in back yelled, "Gunfire!" and the flight engineer simultaneously announced over the ICS that they had taken numerous hits and a fuel line was severed causing a massive fuel leak inside the aircraft.

The copilot grabbed his rifle and shot back. Mixon finished the turn and flew the helicopter off the mountain ledge. The PJ was unable to bring his weapon on target and didn't fire. It is fortuitous that he did not. The two crewmen in the cabin were drenched with jet fuel and the downwash from the rotor blades coming in through the open cockpit windows whipped up the volatile fuel, coating everyone and everything. For a time Mixon refrained from working any switch or using the radio for fear of a spark that would obliterate them. When they shut down the fuel boost pump for the severed line, the leakage stopped. The flight back to Da Nang took 45 minutes, and upon landing, they immediately evacuated the aircraft.

Yet the day's work for Mixon and his crew was not over. They obtained a replacement HH-3E, Jolly 21, and after briefing the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS Commander and Operations Duty Officer on the situation, launched, and returned to the rescue scene. Jolly 10, the second helicopter to make the rescue attempt, was shot down. Two crewmen were killed. The two survivors joined with the Special Forces troops and made their way to the bottom of the hill where a third Jolly Green made a successful rescue. Mixon and his crew flew high bird on this pick-up.<sup>18</sup>

## Nail-53

Lieutenant James C. Quinn was on a Laos orbit as aircraft commander in a HC-130P, and Lieutenant (jg) Robert T. Ritchie was in Laos looking for a downed OV-10 pilot. The thick jungle canopy was making it difficult to locate the survivor but Ritchie knew him to be somewhere on the west slope of the valley. Radio contact was established. Nail 53 could hear the helicopter but he could not see it. After further conversations, Ritchie felt he had the pilot located and lowered the penetrator. At this moment radio contact was lost.

Ritchie had the flight engineer leave the penetrator down waiting for an indication the survivor was on the penetrator by shaking the cable signaling he was ready to be pulled up. After a reasonable wait period with no signal, the penetrator was raised and Ritchie moved to another spot, sending it down again. This fishing continued but Nail 53 did not respond. The low-fuel warning lights illuminated, and Ritchie informed Quinn he would need fuel. After a few more minutes without a

nibble from the survivor, Ritchie instructed the flight engineer to retract the penetrator because they had to depart. The flight engineer responded, indicating it felt like someone suddenly was jiggling the penetrator. Shortly thereafter came the pull-up signal.

When the low-fuel lights came on in an HH-3, the pilot had 15 to 20 minutes of fuel remaining. Five minutes had passed since the initial warning. It took additional time to reel in 210 feet of cable and get the survivor inside. Ritchie alerted Quinn that his situation was critical — if he could not hit the trailing fuel-hose drogue on the first try, he would be in need of rescue.

With full power on the jet engines, Ritchie began his climb. Suddenly the adrenaline flowed as something dark and massive appeared below him. It was a HC-130P with drogues streaming. Quinn had left orbit at altitude, and amazingly, came up under the Jolly Green just above the treetops before the helicopter cleared the ridge line of the compact valley. Ritchie plugged in and they climbed out as one.<sup>20</sup>

[Hitting the refueling basket in a drogue streaming from the HC-130 requires a high measure of skill. The target tends five degrees left of the helicopters centerline and to get the probe into the basket, the pilot enters into air turbulence caused by the C-130 propellers and wingtips. The long probe extending forward dips when the helicopter accelerates and rises when it decelerates. The pilot starts above the basket and flies into it. Furthermore, the probe has to slam into the drogue with at least 160 foot-pounds of force for a seal to occur.]



*An HH-3E pilot's view from his helicopter "plugged into" a n HC-130P "tanker"*

Quinn had flown under the HH-3E as it was climbing out to put the helicopter in the right position. Ritchie hit the probe on the first try. The coordination, dexterity and the marked degree of flying skill on the part of both pilots was exceptional.



*An "all Coastie" operation...LT Casey Quinn, pilot of the refueler HC-130P...LT Jim Loomis and LTJG Bob Ritchie, pilots of the HH-3E...LT Dick Butchka, pilot of the second HH-3E (and photographer)*

## Seabird 02

Lieutenant James C. Quinn got another chance to test his skill. Word came that two crewmen had just ejected from SeaBird 02, a F-105, just north of the Mu Gia pass in North Vietnam. Quinn was aircraft commander of an HC-130P, King 3, backing up King 2. The C-130 mission was dual purpose. To provide in-flight refueling for the helicopters as well as mission control for the rescue effort. They were the command aircraft and coordinated all forces used in the recovery. This included, in addition to the rescue helicopters, the Spads, FACs, fast movers, and the downed aircraft's wingman. The communication equipment was extensive providing UHF, VHF, HF, and FM capabilities. Quinn remarked that the coordination within the C-130 was essential, and the Air Force crew professionalism he experienced was outstanding.

Quinn rendezvoused with two HH-3Es, four HH-53s and four A-1s. King 2 recommended a holding pattern five miles west of the Laotian border for Quinn's incoming flight and their fighter cap of fast movers. The Joint Rescue Control Center (JRCC) did not concur with the recommended location because of SAM missile activity and directed Quinn to a point nineteen miles further south. Quinn was unaware that the JRCC did not notify the fighter cap of the change in plan. Refueling began on a westerly heading at 9,000 feet descending with the north-south ridgeline reaching up to 7,500 feet below them. Quinn was in communication with the Jolly Greens. The copilot, First Lieutenant Joe Ryan, and the navigator, Major Tony Otea, were monitoring the operational frequencies for MiG and Sam activities. Otea

plotted these locations on the navigation chart.

The HH-3s fueled first, hooking up at 8,000 feet, the highest the H-3 could fly, keep up with the C-130 and not stall. Quinn had 70-percent flaps down and was flying the C-130 at just over 100 knots. The two H-3 helicopters had fueled and Jolly 70, a HH-53B, was moving into position. Jolly 71 and Jolly 72 were in a loose trail with a Sandy sitting outboard of each. Air Force Lieutenant Jim “Jinks” Bender, in Sandy 04 said, “A report came in on a MiG in our vicinity. This is when a MiG hit the formation. The first missile it fired missed. The second hit Jolly 71, and it disintegrated. Everyone started yelling — *Migs — Migs — TAKE IT DOWN!* — We headed for the weeds.”

The helicopters dove for the ground at max rate and Quinn sent his C-130 diving toward the earth. The refueling baskets for the helicopters were larger than those used to fuel the jets and had a max speed restriction when extended. This speed was exceeded before the drogues were fully retracted and both were ripped off.

A second MiG-21 joined in and came after the C-130. Quinn, by now, was at tree top level. Jolly 72 called out that a MiG passed his right side and was headed for the C-130. When Quinn was at Eglin AFB checking out in the HC-130P, he stated the “Herk” performed so well that it was like a four-engine fighter plane. He was going to get the chance to prove it!

Quinn said he knew it would take three to five seconds for the MiG to get a missile lock, so he picked the canyon just ahead and jinked and flew his “Herk” in a series of unpredictable, erratic maneuvers between the walls at tree top level. No missiles were launched that Quinn could determine but he could see the bursts from the MiG’s cannon hit the karst ahead. He said he was too busy to dwell on it. Moments later, the C-130 emerged from the canyon — the MiG-21 did not! Quinn got his MiG, but due to the chaos that existed, he never received confirmation on the “kill.”<sup>21</sup>



*Lt. Col. Tyner, Squadron Commanding Officer, presenting medals to LT Casey Quinn, USCG and Capt. Mitchell, USAF*

## Misty 11

The goal of the combat rescue and recovery units was to get to those in peril before “Charlie” (Vietcong). Whether the mission was an extraction or the pick up of a downed airman, each time they were successful it was a win! This was called a “save,” but a “save” was much more than a statistic to these men. A “save” was a person, and they took it personally. The 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS was coming up on the 500<sup>th</sup> “save” in mid-October 1969. Everyone was looking forward to it. They arrived at number 497, then hit a dry spell for about a week.

On 24 October, Misty 11 went down and through a connected series of events, Lieutenant Butchka retrieved numbers 498, 499, and 500. Lieutenant (jg) Ritchie claimed numbers 501 and 502.

Northeast of Saravane, Laos, Misty 11, an Air Force F-100F flying ground interdiction suffered engine failure from antiaircraft fire. The two crewmen ejected. An airborne FAC, Nail 07, reported both survivors down within a hundred yards of one another and that he was in radio contact with them. Misty 11A had a broken leg. Misty 11B was unhurt. Before sending in the helicopter, A-1s trolled the area, but their repeated passes brought no response from enemy ground-fire. Butchka, in high bird orbiting at 3,000 feet, watched his good friend, Air Force Captain Charles Langham, descend for the recovery. Langham entered a hover over Misty 11A and lowered the PJ by hoist.

The PJ immediately had the downed airman on the forest penetrator and gave the cable-up signal. Less than a minute had elapsed. When the penetrator was approximately 10 feet off the ground, the helicopter came under attack. Butchka saw three sides of the blind canyon twinkling. Skyraiders rushed in to suppress the fire, but the opening volley shot the hoist assembly off its mounting, sending it crashing into the flight engineers chest and dumping the PJ and Misty 11A back on the ground unable to be retrieved by the helicopter. Realizing the hoist was inoperative, the flight engineer hit the switch cutting the cable and yelled to Langham to pull off.

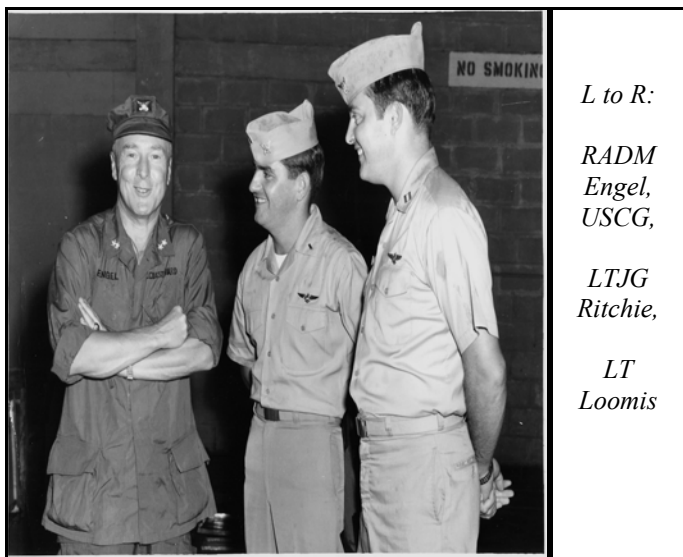
Above, Butchka punched off his auxiliary fuel tanks and went into a plunging descent at max rate. Seeing Langham’s aircraft smoking and streaming fluid, Butchka told him to put the helicopter on the ground. Langham searched for a clear spot and put the aircraft into a small punch bowl-shaped valley. Langham and crew jumped out of the helicopter into the elephant grass, looking up for high bird. They did not have far to look. Butchka’s helicopter was in a 25-foot hover on the left side of Langham’s helicopter with its hoist cable waiting. Butchka expected ground fire from the enemy at any moment. During the swift pick up, the helicopter

shuddered with a jolt to the right side. The aircraft's skin was holed with a gash eight inches long by two inches wide.

With the men safely on board, the next problem was getting out of there. Butchka did not want to go back out the way he came because of heavy enemy fire. Weather was hot and humid, pressure altitude was high, and the only other way out presented him with a vertical face rising about 130 feet. It was decision time. Butchka said; "I headed for the face, pulled every bit of power I could, and with a little bit of airspeed drooped the rotor to 94-percent — and just cleared the top." As he eased over the ridgeline, the Jolly immediately came under heavy ground fire from a different direction. Sandy lead hadn't reported anything because he didn't know where Butchka was. Miraculously they were not hit.

There were still two Misty crewmembers and Langham's PJ on the ground at the initial recovery spot. The PJ, Technical Sergeant D.G. Smith, using his hand-held radio, directed air strikes bracketing their position. Jolly 76, from Udorn, made three recovery attempts but each time received intense ground fire resulting in extensive battle damage to the helicopter. Jolly 76 was forced to withdraw.

Later that afternoon the Jollies tried again. Sandies made suppression runs and laid a smokescreen. Ritchie made his run in to the pickup area. Normal procedure was to come into the wind. Ritchie, however, using the smoke for cover, approached from a different direction, and came in down wind. He swooped in fast and quickly put the aircraft into a hover over Smith. After getting Smith and the injured crewmember on board, Ritchie moved to recover the other aircrewman, Misty B, but was driven off by enemy fire. He would make three more attempts but the element of surprise was lost. On the third try, his hoist was shot away, and he had to break off further attempts. Misty 11B was recovered late that day by another helicopter.<sup>22</sup>



*L to R:*

*RADM  
Engel,  
USCG,*

*LTJG  
Ritchie,*

*LT  
Loomis*

## Covey

Coast Guard aviators Lieutenant Commander Joseph L. Crowe and Lieutenant Roderick Martin III arrived at the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS in May of 1971. The HH-53B/C Super Jolly had replaced the HH-3E by this time. The HH-53 was larger, more heavily armed, and with almost double the shaft horsepower, it had better overall performance and hover capability, especially at altitude. The air campaign was active in southern North Vietnam and along the Ho chi Minh trail in Laos.

On 4 June, two OV-10 Covey FAC crewmen ejected successfully over a heavily defended area near Boloven's Plateau in Laos after their aircraft was hit by enemy ground-fire. The area, which contained a considerable number of anti-aircraft weapons, was first hit by fast movers then hit again by the Sandies. Sandy lead felt there was one part of the area that was too close to the downed pilots to "sanitize" so they obscured that part with smoke just prior to the Jollies' run inbound.

Crowe, in Jolly 64, planned to fly at maximum speed at tree top level along the canyon rim. [With the improved performance of the rescue helicopters, such as the HH-53, terrain became a useful ally rather than a hindrance. Ridgelines, karst, and jungle canopy could now be used to minimize the effectiveness of enemy fire. Antiaircraft guns, which grew in number and caliber throughout the war, were limited by the same jungle that hid them. Gunners could track their targets only within the confining limits of geographic features].

Crowe left his high-altitude orbit, dropping at several-thousand-feet-per-minute, with the escort Sandies joined up and rolled out on the inbound heading at 170 knots. Crowe noted how "watching the Sandies lay smoke, swirl around in rocket, machine gun, and cluster bomb passes really got the adrenaline flowing. By the time you could discern whose tracers are whose, you were too busy to do anything except trust in God and the Sandies and jink like hell."

The first survivor was located and hoisted without difficulty. The second was different. He was located on a jungle-covered ridge within the canyon. Trees were taller than the 250-foot rescue cable, so Crowe carefully eased the helicopter down into the tree canopy, mowing a vertical path with the main rotor blades enabling the penetrator at the end of the cable to reach the downed airman. During egress the helicopter came under fire which was returned by the PJ's, but damage sustained was light.<sup>23</sup>

This one went well! Crowe said, "I cannot describe the sensation of victory I had as we rode wing on King, HC-130P, on-scene control aircraft and tanker, taking on fuel with the fast movers making aileron roll passes and loops around us. The sky was never quite so blue or the

clouds so puffy white.”

Major Ross, the second pilot to come out, said he made radio contact as soon as he took cover. He added, “When I heard the Jolly Greens were coming, I was so damned happy I couldn’t believe it! I knew if anybody could get us out, they would do it. I knew what kind of people they were and there’s just something about the words Jolly Green — it stays with you from the first time you hear it until the time you need their skills.”

In one of those “*can you believe this?*” situations, Crowe would again pick up the same two pilots several weeks later.

Summer came and the action continued. Martin brought his total to eight saves, and Crowe got a couple of more in an unusual way. He scrambled [took off immediately] out of Bien Hoa to pick up two downed airmen in Cambodia. The two survivors were in an area surrounded by enemy forces. Crowe received a thorough briefing en route to the pickup area by the on scene FAC. The location of the downed airmen was well marked, so rather than sanitize the area, Crowe initiated a rapid descent from 8,000 feet using a spiraling autorotation to a power recovery. Surprise was complete. The survivors were taken on board, followed by an immediate departure. Sporadic tracer fire was noted on leaving but no damage was sustained by the aircraft.<sup>24</sup>

## Air Force Organization

The organization of ARRS squadrons differed from the norm. The Air Force is organized into wings composed of groups, which are in turn made up of squadrons with separate flight and maintenance commands. The ARRS squadrons were under the operational control of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ARR group at Tan Sa Nhut but were unique in that they were self sufficient within the squadron and combined the maintenance and flight operations under one command. The commanding officer was a Lieutenant Colonel and pilot. Under his command was an operations officer, a maintenance officer, and an administrative officer.

Responsibilities were reflected by the title. The administrative officer was normally a non-pilot. The maintenance officer could be either a pilot or a non-flying officer. The operations officer, always a pilot, a Major in rank, was second in command. Each section had a staff of enlisted specialists. Collateral duties for squadron pilots were operational only. Crowe, Mixon, and Stice served as squadron operations officers. It is in this capacity that Crowe planned the Quang Tri evacuation — later referred to as the *Miracle Mission*.

## Quang Tri

Grouped in the Citadel, a walled military compound in

the middle of Quang Tri proper, were 132 American advisors and members of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Caught in the onslaught of the North Vietnamese offensive that began 30 March 1972 with a drive across the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone between North and South Vietnam], Quang Tri was now surrounded by four North Vietnam Army (NVA) divisions. The enemy had cut Highway 1, the only escape route south to safety, and for several weeks had been pounding Quang Tri with artillery, mortars, and rockets. There was only one way out — by helicopter. On 1 May, five HH-53s of the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS were prepared to do just that.

The potential for disaster was as great as the potential for success. The mission had to be well planned and executed. Planning was the responsibility of Lieutenant Commander Jay Crowe, the squadron operations officer. He used elements from Air Force, Army, and Navy.

His problem: If the helicopters went in low, they would be subject to intense opposing gunfire, plus the Quail, a hand-held, heat-seeking missile. If they went in high, then SAMs, surface to air missiles, became the threat. There simply was no ‘safe’ altitude. What made the situation even more difficult for the Jolly Greens was the fact that the landing zone was small. Located inside the Citadel, it was large enough for only one helicopter at a time. And like everything else of military significance in Quang Tri, the LZ had been zeroed in by enemy artillery for several days. Add to that the fact that any flight route to the Citadel was over several miles of NVA held territory. Losses greater than 25-percent were expected.

According to the evacuation plan, three helicopters, with two on airborne standby, would be needed to get the people out. Number one on the list of priorities was to suppress and eliminate the anti-aircraft batteries in and around Quang Tri. Bilk 11, an O-2 Skymaster, was the FAC and directed the fast movers, F-4 Phantoms, on a series of strikes. The Sandies, A-1 Skyraiders, were next and suppressed opposition along a corridor from the citadel to the beach east of Quang Tri. Orbiting over the coastline, the Jolly crews were alert to everything happening on the ground and in the air. Aboard the first helicopter was an Army aviator who had been into the Citadel many times. He would serve as a guide to the LZ for the lead Jolly Green. Sandy lead came up on the radio and directed the first Jolly Green to a point on the beach where he had put smoke. This would be the entry point for the run to the Citadel.

Sandies did their job well, strafing and bombing enemy positions. They accompanied the Jollies in but there were so many enemy troops below that the Jolly Greens still had to weave through a corridor of ground fire coming from tanks and anti-aircraft guns. Then, on the ground even for a few minutes, they were extremely

vulnerable. Despite constant radio chatter, no one in the helicopter paid any attention — all eyes were on the LZ, only a few meters away, and on the crowd of people waiting for the first Jolly Green. Artillery and rocket shells were exploding all over Quang Tri. The Sandies had laid a heavy smoke screen blanketing three sides of the LZ. When the number one Jolly Green touched down, 37 people quickly scrambled aboard. It departed immediately. Number two Jolly Green followed and picked up 45 people. The remaining troops came out on Jolly Green number three.

By 1850 hours, the operation was over. Everybody was safe at Da Nang. However, the incredible part of the story was just being realized. Not one crewmember or evacuee sustained any injury whatsoever! Moreover, there was no battle damage to any helicopter. Not even a single bullet hole! One Sandy supporting the rescue was downed as was a FAC aircraft. Both pilots were saved. The FAC pilot bailed out and was rescued by friendly ground forces. The Sandy pilot ditched his A-1 in the ocean and was picked up by an Army helicopter crew.

Lieutenant Colonel William Harris, Commander 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS, was effusive in his praise of the team effort represented by the Quang Tri rescue. He said, “Without the support of the FACS, the F-4s, the Sandies and the Navy, we couldn’t have pulled this one off at all. I also hope everyone will remember the team members who didn’t make the headlines.”

In the process of planning and coordinating this mission, Crowe had become privy to considerable amounts of classified information. As a result, he was not allowed to participate in the rescue operation or fly any further missions during the last month of his tour.<sup>25</sup>

## Stice & Long

Beginning in 1972, the South Vietnamese Army deployed a new division along the DMZ in the firebases formerly occupied by the Marines. A dry-season communist offensive had been anticipated but the size and intensity had not. A large-scale air campaign against North Vietnamese military targets and supply lines named *Linebacker I* was initiated to neutralize and halt the invasion.

It was during this air campaign that Coast Guard Lieutenants Jack Stice and Bobby Long arrived at Da Nang. Stice, while on his “in-country” checkout made his first save.

An Air Force F-4 was severely damaged by enemy ground-fire about 15 miles southwest of Hue. Describing the incident, Captain Jim Beaver, the F-4 pilot, said, “We were hitting enemy troop locations and got hit with automatic-weapons fire. The airplane still flew alright and we made for the ocean and turned for Da Nang.

However, my backseater, Lieutenant Andy Haskel, noticed a small fire. An explosion followed, and we ejected.”

Stice and his crew saw the ejection, proceeded directly to the survivors, and picked up both. They were in the water less than 15 minutes.

Stice again made a similar pickup several weeks later. An F-4 had been shot up and had managed to get “feet wet” [flight over water] — barely. Air Force Captain Borocz, pilot of the first Jolly picked up the F-4 pilot. Stice in the number two jolly picked up the backseater. Air Force First Lieutenant Mike McDaniel, Stice's copilot, said, “We went for the second man as the PJs were arming the mini-guns. We went into a normal “Coastie hover”, Sergeant Hammock ran the hoist down right next to the pilot, and we fished him out of the sea.”



*LT Jack Stice (in the “Snoopy” Cap) displaying the Coast Guard Ensign after pickup of Wolf 04  
L to R: Sgt. Hammond, PJ, 1/Lt McDaniel, 1/Lt Land, Capt. Borocz, Stice, 1/Lt Stout, Sgt. Richardson, PJ*



*Ship’s Bell presented to LT Stice and LT Long by the squadron PJs. There was a natural bonding between the PJs and the Coasties. L to R: Long, Msgt Bradley, Sgt Quillan, Stice and Sgt Baker (kneeling)*



## Helicopter Flight Training

The Army began training Air Force helicopter pilots at the end of 1970. For the first time, Air Force pilots were being trained with no previous rotary-wing time. The new helicopter pilots started at Fort Rucker and continued their training at Ft. Wolters. From there, the HH-53 pilots went to Hill AFB for combat crew training. Over-water operation was not part of the training. In 1972, newly trained low-time pilots were arriving at the 37<sup>th</sup> directly from initial training.

Coast Guard Lieutenants Jack K. Stice and Bobby Long both said they spent many hours teaching the “newbies” how to establish a stabilized hover using a visual reference point independent of the wave action. Then once established in a hover, had them make small corrections to their position over an object as directed by the hoist operator (enlisted flight engineer) aft in the cabin. Air Force pilots were unaccustomed to utilizing the flight engineer in this manner. The Air Force pilots in the squadron referred to this as the “normal Coastie hover”

## Nail 60

Not everyone was able to reach the relative safety of the ocean. Such was the case for Nail 60, an OV-10 FAC crew. The two ejected close to the Laotian/South Vietnamese border about 40 miles southwest of Hue. Nail 36, nearby, acted as on scene commander and directed the rescue aircraft to scene. Low cloud ceilings and high mountainous terrain were hindering factors. Four Sandies and two Jollies were launched. Upon arrival, Sandy 07 assumed duties as on scene commander. Radio contact was made with Nail 60A, one of the crew. He was okay, but Nail 60B was injured and could not move away from his parachute.

Jolly Greens 65 and 66 arrived on scene 30 minutes later with the weather still marginal. Jolly 65 was low bird. Coast Guard Lieutenant Bobby Long was the aircraft commander. A visual sighting was obtained on Nail 60A, and Jolly 65 headed in with a Sandy escort. Pick up was made with a minimum of hostile opposition, and Jolly 65 proceeded to Nail 60B’s position. This downed airman was known to need assistance in recovery so the PJ, Sergeant Caldwell, descended with the penetrator. He determined that Nail 60B had a broken back, and he ordered a litter sent down from the hovering helicopter.

Long put the helicopter right down into the trees to minimize target presentation. As the litter was being lowered by the hoist, his crew reported a group of armed men approaching the aircraft. Long relayed this to the Sandies who promptly took them out. The Sandies then

set up a race-track pattern to suppress any further incoming fire. Twenty minutes transpired from the time the litter went down to the time Nail 60B and Caldwell were on their way back up. All this time, Long maintained his hover. He said when fired upon, they returned fire with their mini guns, but it was the Sandies that made the rescue possible. Without them, it could not have been done.<sup>26</sup>

## Peace Talks

The *Linebacker I* campaign was deemed successful. By mid-October, with depleted war materiel and a stalled invasion, North Vietnam communicated its willingness to negotiate a peace agreement. President Richard M. Nixon terminated the operation to signal his cooperation. On 30 November 1972, official word was received that the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS was being de-activated. About a third of the aircrews were reassigned to the 40<sup>th</sup> ARRS at NKP. Coast Guard Lieutenant Jack Stice, although junior in rank, was selected to plan and execute the transfer of men and aircraft to NKP. This was questioned by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Group, but Lieutenant Colonel Sutton was firm in his decision stating that Stice had the experience, was the most qualified to do the job, and that rank was not the primary consideration.<sup>27</sup>

In mid December, North Vietnam was intransigent at the peace talks. President Nixon sent Hanoi an ultimatum to come back to serious negotiations. The ultimatum was ignored, and on 18 December, *Operation Linebacker II* was launched to intimidate North Vietnam. In 11 days of devastating bombing, most of the intended targets were destroyed, breaking down the war-making capabilities of North Vietnam. It was an around-the-clock operation using large numbers of B-52s and aircraft from five Navy aircraft carriers. After years of restrictive engagements, U.S. air power was finally allowed to demonstrate what it could do.<sup>28</sup> In *Linebacker II*, the U.S. lost 15 B-52s and 12 other aircraft. The overall loss rate was below 2-percent.<sup>29</sup> The Jolly Greens rescued 25 downed aircrewmembers. North Vietnam forces captured 41. Because the targets were in highly defended areas, not one crewmember was picked up in North Vietnam. There were limits as to what the helicopters – even the giant HH-53s — could take, but that did not mean the Jollies did not try.<sup>30</sup>



*LT Stice and crew check bullet holes in their Jolly Green. They had returned from a Laos pickup flying the river at near water level. Some incoming hostile fire was from above*

## Jackal 33

On 23 December, Jackal 33, an F-111, was shot down in a karst area 17 miles southeast of Hanoi. Beepers signals from both pilots' survival radios were heard the next day and rescue forces were launched. Mountains were protruding through a solid undercast, which precluded strike aircraft from delivering ordinance and any pick up attempt by the rescue helicopters. Both Jackal 33A and Jackal 33B were advised to move to higher ground, stay well hidden, and call on their survival radio whenever fast movers were heard. Weather again barred rescue attempts on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. Weather cleared on the 27<sup>th</sup> and Jolly 73 and Jolly 66 proceeded to the rescue area. They refueled from the HC-130P tanker King 27 and rendezvoused with Sandies just inside the North Vietnamese border.

The helicopters started the final run to the rescue area with Air Force Captain Dick Shapiro in Jolly 73 in the lead and Coast Guard Lieutenant Bobby Long commanding Jolly 66 in trail. Jolly 66 was instructed to hold 15 miles out with Sandy 03 as cover. Shapiro said that a half mile out, he could see the karst area where Jackal 33B was located. Ragged peaks extended to about 2,000 feet with a gentle slope at the top. About two-thirds of the way up the slope, the helicopter began taking heavy 51-caliber fire from their right. Shapiro could see the tracers go past the nose, and one of the Sandies reported fuel streaming from the right side of Jolly 73. The survivor was hidden on an elephant-grass covered ledge.

Airman First Class Jones returned fire with his minigun into the gun position silencing it. Jackel 33B popped a smoke signal and Shapiro came to a hover over him. By this time, the helicopter was taking fire from all sides. As the penetrator was being lowered, the aircraft took a number of AK-47 rounds in the cockpit from surrounding trees. The copilot, Air Force Captain Pereira, was hit as they continued taking gunfire from underneath the aircraft. Jolly 73 was zeroed in, and the survivor had not climbed on the penetrator. Shapiro executed an immediate egress to the right and down the hill. He said the helicopter went into an almost uncontrollable oscillation, which smoothed out as his airspeed went through 80 knots.

Shapiro surveyed the damage. He was getting surges in both engines, the hydraulic system was indicating minimum pressure and oscillating, he was getting yaw kicks, the radar altimeter was out and the UHF radio was intermittent. Long volunteered to go in for another attempt, but it was decided that given the conditions, there was no way a rescue attempt would be successful.

Long followed Shapiro out of the immediate area and handled radio communications for him. Long informed King that Shapiro would need fuel and to meet them.

When Jolly 73 tried to extend the fueling probe, it would not budge. Shapiro tried to refuel without the probe extended. As soon as contact was made, fuel started streaming from the probe and he got a disconnect. Fuel was critical and Jolly 73 was going to have to find a place to land. Long had been monitoring the situation and had already picked out an emergency landing area to which he directed Shapiro. When Shapiro retarded the throttles on landing all power was lost and the rotor blades began oscillating badly. The crew was out of the aircraft within 30 seconds after touchdown.

In Shapiro's mission summary, he states: "I can't give enough credit to Captain Long [In the mission summary, Shapiro referred to Lieutenant Long by his equivalent rank in the Air Force. This was later corrected]. On egress, I was having communications problems. Captain Long took care of communications for me. Realizing that I would have to land in mountainous terrain because of impending fuel starvation, Captain Long scouted ahead of our route of flight for a possible secure landing area. When I made the decision to land the aircraft and requested assistance, Captain Long was already hovering over a spot not more than a mile away. As I entered the area, he began talking me into touchdown. He landed shortly after I touched down, as close as possible to us. His crew had us on board within a short period. Had it not been for his invaluable assistance, our crew would have been engaging enemy personnel during the next few hours."

A short time later, a Jolly Green orbiting as back up tried to land to salvage equipment. They came under fire from a group of 50 or 60 people and quickly exited the area. A Sandy flight was called in and destroyed the helicopter.<sup>31</sup>



*Valley southeast of Hanoi, North Vietnam from a Jolly. The mission was the attempted rescue of Jackel 33. It was not far from here that LT Bobby Long picked up the crew of Jolly 73.*

## Misty

Major General Don Shepperd, USAF (Ret) was a

Misty FAC pilot during the war in Vietnam. He tells of an F-4 that went down in the Ashau Valley. Shepperd, Misty 34, an F-100, was on scene with Misty 21 and two Sandies. The downed F-4 backseater had a broken leg and was located on the side of a mountain overlooking the valley. One Jolly Green was maneuvering to pick him up. The F-4's frontseater was okay, down in the middle of the valley. His collapsed chute was clearly visible and the North Vietnamese had him surrounded. He was calling for ordnance to be put right next to his chute and said the 'bad guys' were all around and coming closer.

Sandy lead directed the Misties to fly a north-south pattern. The Sandies were working east-west. The pilot was 50 meters west of his chute with the enemy closing. The patterns were timed so that a Misty was rolling in just as a Sandy pulled off resulting in max ordinance being delivered to the target area on a sustained basis.

Shepperd noticed the lead Jolly was now in a hover about one mile east of his position. The PJ was being lowered on the hoist to assist the injured pilot. A short time later, while on a downwind leg, he again glanced towards the hovering Jolly that was picking up the backseater. He saw the Jolly being hit repeatedly by gunfire. He heard the Jolly pilot tell Sandy lead in a calm voice, "We're picking up some hits — we'll be out of here in a couple of minutes." He was cool as ice.

When Shepperd heard this, he cut loose with a few choice words of admiration! He went on to say:

"This guy had a set! We continued our passes over the downed pilot and on each downwind, I looked at the helicopter. I watched him on four patterns, and although I didn't count, I'm sure he was hit 20-30 times just while I was watching. Courage is a core competency often ascribed to the military. Its synonym, bravery, is associated with fighter pilots — most of the time by the fighter pilots themselves — but this day I knew who owned the title - *bravest of the brave* - JOLLY GREEN PILOTS! — hands down, bar none, no contest!"<sup>32</sup>

## Courage

Where did these men get the courage to go out almost daily for a year knowing that hostile forces were waiting to kill them each time they went? Lieutenant Commander Lonnie L. Mixon did not know, other than to observe that some found strength in religion, some found it in drink, and others in themselves. Only those who have willfully placed themselves in harms way and have experienced the deep innermost feelings which come from saving another's life can truly understand.<sup>33</sup>

Fear was present — it did not go away, but a brave man can control it and even use it to his advantage.

Without fear, there is no courage. Lieutenant Richard V. Butchka said each time he got ready to go, his mouth felt dry and he found speaking was an effort, but once into the mission, this would disappear.<sup>34</sup>

The Jolly Greens were determined to make the save. The "bad guys" were determined not to let it happen. The air rescue forces in Southeast Asia didn't get all of the downed airmen but no one can say they didn't try. They did get 3,883<sup>35</sup> and provided the world with thousands of examples of unselfish humanity. A report prepared by the Air Force Inspection and Safety Center, summarizing helicopter use in combat rescues, noted that during the Vietnam War between 1965 and 1972 helicopters came under significant hostile fire in 645 opposed combat rescue operations involving downed aircraft. Aircrewmembers were rescued in six hundred, or 93-percent, of these cases. This was not accomplished without cost. The 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS lost 28 men including Coast Guard Lieutenant Jack C. Rittichier.

Coast Guard aviators who served on the rescue team were highly praised by many. The Coast Guard aviators said their exceptional proficiency was a product of their motivation to save lives, rather than individual brilliance. These volunteers no doubt downplayed themselves to avoid sounding boastful, but the commendations and awards presented to them prove not only their incentive, but most certainly their flying skills and bravery as well. This group of men was awarded four Silver Stars, fifteen Distinguished Flying Crosses, and eighty-six Air Medals.

Their numbers were not large — their contribution was huge. They regularly put their lives on the line to save fellow airmen who were in peril of death or capture. Their focus was on duty, honor, country, and Coast Guard. Their mission was noble. They were much more than participants — they were heroes. Their performance brought honor upon themselves, Coast Guard aviation and the United States Coast Guard. History should ever reflect their honorable actions.



*End of an Era  
L to R:  
LTJG Rob Ritchie,  
LT Dick Butchka*

*A last evening  
in Da Nang  
before shipping out  
to the States.*



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## MILITARY AWARD CRITERIA



**Silver Star Medal**

*For distinguished gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States or while serving with friendly forces against an opposing enemy force. The Silver Star is the third highest military award designated solely for heroism in combat.*



**Distinguished Flying Cross Medal**

*Awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the Armed Forces of the United States, distinguishes himself or herself by heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight. The performance of the act of heroism must be evidenced by voluntary action above and beyond the call of duty. The extraordinary achievement must have resulted in an accomplishment so exceptional and outstanding as to clearly set the individual apart from his/her comrades or from other persons in similar circumstances. Awards will be made only to recognize single acts of heroism or extraordinary achievement and will not be made in recognition of sustained operational activities against an armed enemy.*



**Purple Heart Medal**

*Awarded in the name of the President of the United States to any member of an Armed Force who, while serving with the U.S. Armed Services after 5 April 1917, has been wounded or killed, or who has died or may hereafter die after being wounded: (1) In any action against an enemy of the United States; (2) In any action with an opposing armed force of a foreign country in which the Armed Forces of the United States are or have been engaged.*



**Air Medal**

*Awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity in or with the Armed Forces of the United States, shall have distinguished himself/herself by acts of heroism or meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight. Required achievement is less than that required for the Distinguished Flying Cross but must be accomplished with distinction above that expected of professional airmen. Awards may be made to recognize single acts of merit or heroism, or for meritorious service.*

**Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star** *An award presented by the Republic of Vietnam to an individual who while serving with or in conjunction with the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam while engaged in action against an enemy displays exceptional gallantry of marked distinction.*

## **COMBAT RESCUE AWARDS to USCG Aviators**

<b>Lieutenant Richard V. Butchka</b>	<b>Distinguished Flying Cross (2), Air Medal (6)</b>
<b>Lieutenant Commander Joseph L. Crowe</b>	<b>Distinguished Flying Cross (2), Air Medal (9)</b>
<b>Lieutenant Lance A. Eagan</b>	<b>Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal (11)</b>
<b>Lieutenant Thomas F. Frischmann</b>	<b>Air Medal</b>
<b>Lieutenant Robert E. Long</b>	<b>Distinguished Flying Cross (2), Air Medal (8)</b>
<b>Lieutenant James M. Loomis</b>	<b>Air Medal (8)</b>
<b>Lieutenant Roderick Martin</b>	<b>Air Medal (7)</b>
<b>Lieutenant Commander Lonnie L. Mixon</b>	<b>Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal (10), Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star (Individual Award for Gallantry)</b>
<b>Lieutenant James C. Quinn</b>	<b>Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal (8)</b>
<b>Lieutenant (jg) Robert T. Ritchie</b>	<b>Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross (2), Air Medal (7)</b>
<b>Lieutenant Jack C. Rittichier</b>	<b>Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross (3), Purple Heart*, Air Medal (3)</b>
<b>Lieutenant Jack K. Stice</b>	<b>Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal (8)</b>

\*In 2003, Lt Rittichier's remains were recovered and finally laid to rest with military honors at the National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia

## The Author



John "Bear" Moseley, lifetime member of the Ancient Order of the Pterodactyl, is a graduate of the United States Coast Guard Academy, New London, Connecticut. He entered flight training at Pensacola, Florida in 1956 and was awarded his wings of gold in 1957, designated Coast Guard aviator 743. In addition to other Coast Guard flight duties, Moseley specialized in aircraft maintenance. His CG aviation assignments included operational Coast Guard air facility assignments at Biloxi, Mississippi; Agana, Guam; and Arlington, Virginia before entering commercial aviation as a civilian contract employee of the Military Airlift Command flying cargo to Southeast Asia in the 1960's. He then piloted for American Air Lines for 25 years, retiring in 1991 as Captain.

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