



POINT WELCOME

By Major Richard P. Pierzchala, USMC (RET)

During the summer of 1966 I was Captain in the US Marine Corps and assigned as the senior advisor to the 11th field Artillery Battalion, 1st ARVN Division. I was part of Advisor Team 4 stationed in Quang Tri city. The advisor compound was located outside the Quang Tri Citadel.

At that time the Air Forces' Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopters were stationed at the advisor's compound during day light hours for missions into Laos and southern North Vietnam. It was these birds that rescued Navy Lt. Dieter Dengler.

On the morning of 11 August 1966 at approximately 0400 I along with a radio operator went to the communication's bunker in an attempt to place a MARS (Military Affiliated Radio System) call to my wife back in the States. We had permission to use the Air Force radios at night for making MARS calls. Out of habit I turned all the radios on.

As were trying to raise a MARS station in the US we heard the following radio message, "Any station this net, any station this net, this is ----- (call sign forgotten). I didn't respond to the first call but answered the second call with my call sign (Gold something 22) (Our call signs changed every month).

His response to me was "My playmate is down, my playmate is down." I though I was talking to a pilot. I identified myself again with my call sign and asked him if he need any help. His reply was, "my playmate is down, my playmate is down." I again asked him if he needed help and again he replied "my playmate is down, my playmate is down." From his voice or maybe a gut feeling I knew that this wasn't some VC hoax and this guy was an American in trouble. I spoke to him in clear language telling him I was the artillery advisor in Quang Tri Province and if he need help to talk to me in plain English. It was then he replied that he was a US Coast Guard ship and they were being strafed and bombed by jet aircraft under illumination.

As these could only be American aircraft I switched my radio to the "Guard" frequency and stated that "if there were any US aircraft attacking a ship under illumination it was a US ship they were attacking." I'm fairly certain this quote is accurate.

I then switched frequencies and talked again with the other party. He told me the attack had stopped. In the subsequent conversations I found out he was going to

beach the vessel at the mouth of the Qua Viet River near the Vietnamese Junk Base. He also told me he had a number of wounded. I signed off with him and contacted the Marines at Hue Phu Bai and requested medivacs.

I remember this part of the conversation well because the Marine radio operator told me it was dark out as I was calling for the medivacs. I told him to launch the birds because it would be light out by the time they arrived at the Qua Viet.

After the medivacs arrived I signed off and never heard of the incident again during the rest of my tour. Sorry my memory fails me with the call signs and more exact quotes.

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