



*Coast Guard Oral History Program*

*First-Person Accounts of Coast Guard History*

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## Lieutenant Jack Rittichier's Vietnam Rescue Missions - 1968

### In His Own Words



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#### **Editor:**

The following is a transcript of a cassette tape made by Lieutenant Jack Rittichier, USCG, a Coast Guard helicopter pilot assigned to duty in Vietnam. LT Rittichier had volunteered for an exchange program with the Air Force and he was assigned to the Air Force's 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron [ARRS], based at Da Nang, in the Republic of Vietnam. Once with the 37th ARRS, Rittichier began flying the large Sikorsky HH-3E "Jolly Green Giant" rescue helicopters on incredibly dangerous combat search and rescue missions as both a copilot and soon thereafter as an aircraft commander and "Rescue Crew Commander." In the tape he describes, in great detail, a number of rescue missions he undertook in April and May of 1968.

LT Rittichier and his three-man crew of HH-3E "Jolly Green 23" were killed in action the following month, soon after he made the recording.

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**LT Jack Rittichier:** "I was on Alert Duty at Da Nang. I was the Aircraft Commander, which is also known as the Rescue Crew Commander (RCC). I had as my co-pilot, Air Force Captain Robert Hicks, Jr. There was another helicopter on strip alert duty with us and that aircraft was flown by Major Arthur Anderson and his co-pilot was Captain Bill Hagen.

I was the low bird, which put me in command, or I was the individual to make decisions for the two airplanes in the event of alert. We had been scrambled just before noon this day toward Chu Lai where an aircraft had supposed to have crashed. We returned when it was understood that both of the individuals in that crashed airplane were killed. Just before six o'clock in the evening we received word to scramble from Da Nang. Both helicopters were airborne at the same time and we were first told to go to a position 12 miles on the Three One Zero radial from Da Nang. Since it was so very close; only 12 miles, we had very little opportunity to check about artillery in the area where we were going. My job as low bird, and therefore lead, was to take our aircraft in first if a rescue was required. We searched the area; the supposed area, and found that the location given us was erroneous. Low bird, as the name might entail, meant that I stayed down low and looked while the other bird stayed up high and provided cover for me. While we were down searching both aircraft noticed artillery ground bursts. The high bird called a local controlling agency and asked about artillery in the area. The answer came back from the controlling agency that there was no known friendly artillery in the area. Our conclusion was that it was unfriendly artillery. Soon after the position changed from the Three One Zero radial of 12 miles to the Three Two Zero and subsequently again to the Three Two Three radial and 12 miles. We went to this position and found helicopters from other services hovering and in communications with the people on the ground. The situation at the rescue site was that many members of a ground party had been taken aboard a helicopter; a CH-46. The CH-46 attempted to get out of the landing zone and that the CH-46 helicopter crashed on takeoff. The other helicopters in the area did not seem to have rescue capability so it devolved upon us, our flight of Jolly Green Giant helicopters, to initiate action to get the rescue going. As lead I requested all other aircraft to get off the frequency and allow me to communicate directly with the people on the ground, which I did, and communications were, for once, very good. I contacted on the ground a man who did a very fine job under the circumstances. I never got to meet him later on but his call sign was "Quiz Master". He handled his radios in a professional, unhurried, uncluttered and fine manner. I asked him about the status of the people on the ground and he informed me that there were 16 dead. There were 25 wounded and six or nine people from the helicopter crew who were in various conditions of injury and good health. All of these people were located at the crash site, which we will try to call the Landing Zone: "LZ," from now on.

As we arrived on-scene so did bad weather; very thick clouds. The clouds completely covered and obscured the Landing Zone. The high and low birds continued to orbit the area and while doing this we talked to "Quiz Master" and received the following information: "The enemy strength was unknown. The last time the ground party had been fired on was nine o'clock that morning. The ground party had had no contact with any enemy or had heard no enemy since that time". As the helicopters continued to orbit we made many passes over the general vicinity of the LZ and "Quiz Master" kept informing us just about when we were over. By so doing we were able to just about pinpoint his location even though he could not see us and we could not see him because of the intervening clouds. We also informed him that if he noticed any enemy come into the area because of the attraction of the helicopter and the noise we were making, that we would go out to another area and orbit and make low passes to pull the

enemy in that direction rather than attract the enemy to the "Quiz Master's" position. He said he would appreciate it. After almost an hour of orbiting the weather cleared as we hoped it would and I was able to commence an approach. All during this flight my co-pilot, Captain Hicks, was an invaluable aide. The two enlisted men in the back; Sergeant Enricas; the Flight Engineer and Sergeant Baker; the PJ, also did outstanding work.

I had the area pretty well pinpointed and started out a way, dropped my auxiliary external fuel tanks, then dumped down roughly to what might be considered a minimum fuel load so as to get my gross weight down to where I could make an out of ground affect hover, which seemed the only answer.

Back inbound toward the site I made a low, slow, dragged out approach to closely simulate what it would be like coming in and hovering right at the last. We spotted the LZ and waved it off and things seemed to be in good shape. We dumped a couple more hundred pounds to get down to where we knew the mission could go in and hover, then made a quick pattern and came back in.

The approach to the LZ was up a draw, or ravine, heavily wooded; heavy jungle all around. The ravine slanted up into a box canyon, which faced onto a sheer mountain. The approach was uphill. The LZ was on the side of a huge mountain, an extremely steep slope. The LZ itself is somewhat of a misnomer because it was really a bombed out crater sort of thing. Bombs had been dropped there. The bombs blasted down the jungle and the people then had a landing zone so to speak. I asked "Quiz Master" if I could get my helicopter down in between the trees and he said, "H-46s had been doing it." I told him the dimensions of my helicopter and he thought it was possible. The trees surrounding the LZ were 150 to 200 feet tall and he told me my approach would have to be absolutely vertical down in, then my take off would have to be absolutely vertical straight up with all the people aboard.

My approach was made just at dusk. I had no trouble at all locating and identifying the LZ although it was very difficult to see any people down there. Since it was the only cleared spot of jungle within miles, that had to be place. I established a hover over the LZ and commenced to let down vertically and the helicopter performed beautifully. My crew did outstanding work in keeping the helicopter clear of trees and informing me how close we were in all directions so that I could move downward as far as the helicopter would go. When we reached the very bottom level where we had to stop; where we could get no lower, we still were very far from the ground but I determined that if I could move the helicopter forward; still forward on the LZ, that the severe slope would bring the helicopter closer to the ground, although I would be descending no more. So the helicopter moved forward with very little clearance on the rotor blades, either side, and I was able to accomplish a hover of approximately 20 feet above the ground. This is much better than a one or two hundred foot hover that I had anticipated. Moving forward in this position the trees completely overhung above the helicopter on all sides except the tail and that was the direction of course we came into the site. We lowered the tree penetrator but the people on the ground seemed unfamiliar with it. We brought the tree penetrator back up, put the PJ on the penetrator, lowered the PJ and the penetrator back down to the ground, then the PJ was able to explain to the people the operation of the tree penetrator. All through this time there was close coordination between all the crewmembers and the helicopter. The PJ put two people on the penetrator at a time. We hoisted four, put the penetrator back down and then hoisted up the PJ. We really didn't know what we could expect

from enemy forces on this particular approach and pickup. We received no known ground fire. Once the people were placed inside the helicopter we backed away from the steep slope, the slope slanting away from us as we came out from underneath the trees. The crew kept me constantly advised of "Go left" or "Go right, Up", or "Down", so as to keep clear of the trees. I don't think any part of the helicopter ever touched any trees on any of our approaches that day.

We backed out to a point where we could climb up. While backing we climbed 200 feet. The best way out seemed to be, after leveling from the climb, make a rudder turn almost over the spot to keep clear of the trees and then picking up as much speed with the power available, fly back down the ravine, which was downhill and slightly downwind, but that was the best we had available to us and we were able to gain airspeed and flying room in this manner. We got up speed rapidly and climbed out over the nearby hills. It was dark at that time and we headed back toward the Da Nang area as our FE in back and our PJ worked with the people we had just rescued.

We decided to take these people to NSA; a naval hospital, rather than land at Da Nang because we knew the naval hospital had medical facilities and we were unable to determine how quickly we could get the people in the hospital where they belonged if we took them to Da Nang. We were on minimum fuel, dropped the survivors at NSA and flew immediately back to Da Nang just a few miles away and enroute we decided that since many of the people back at the rescue site were not ambulatory, they were litter cases; stretcher cases, that we would pick up as many litters back at Da Nang as we could possibly get.

I briefed the FE to try to get a hot refueling, which meant engines and rotors turning back at Da Nang while they put fuel in the aircraft, which is not the best procedure but it would expedite matters. I briefed the PJ to jump out of the airplane as soon as we got there and pick up every Stokes Litter that he could find and bring it back in the airplane. I briefed the co-pilot that if it was necessary to coordinate anything I was going to have him get out of the airplane and talk with people on the ground rather than pull the people inside the airplane or try and do it by radio. This was all done before we landed at Da Nang.

Landing at Da Nang much of our work had already been done for us by the good coordinators back here at Da Nang. For instance, Colonel Carlyle met us at the airplane while the engines and rotors were still running. He came into the aircraft and told me that they would give us a hot refueling. This meant that my FE did not have to depart too far from the airplane. My co-pilot could stay in the airplane and all I needed to do was send my PJ out and pick up the litters. While we were there it was suggested - and it was a good suggestion - that we take another PJ with us, which we did. This was Sergeant Northern. We did not seem to be on the ground more than five minutes and I was very happy with the coordination and cooperation I received back here at Da Nang to permit us to get out immediately.

We departed Da Nang and took the shortest possible route back to the distress site. Enroute we could see flares being dropped at the rescue site. To back up a few moments in time let me set the scene for you. As I departed the rescue scene with my first four survivors - when I left Jolly Green 21 - Major Anderson was supposed to have been the next airplane coming in because he was the high bird and ours was the flight scrambled. However, just about this time two other Jolly Green helicopters arrived on-scene. We had requested other helicopters prior to my departure. These two helicopters were Jolly Green 25 and Jolly Green 10. Jolly Green

25 claimed he had minimum fuel and requested to get in right away to make his pickup. Jolly Green 21 relinquished his position allowing 25 to go in next. Jolly Green 25 and 21 had come down from a forward operating location up north of Da Nang and were on their way home when they got the message to come over and help us at this distress site. The reason they were at low fuel was because they had landed at Da Nang enroute to our position and had dropped off their auxiliary fuel tanks. Therefore Jolly Green 25 moved in for the next pickup. The pilot was Major Billy Winfield. He stated he also noted field artillery ground bursts near our positions. All of our Jolly Green helicopters engaged in the rescue that night stated that they saw artillery ground bursts although the controlling agencies stated that there was no known friendly artillery firing into our area. Jolly Green 25 turned on his landing lights and flood lights, made an approach to the LZ. He hovered over the trees. He did not go down in among and under the trees as I had done. He picked up four people from a high hover. He stated then that he backed out of the position, executed a turn and headed back for the Da Nang area.

Next, Jolly Green 21; my high bird, moved in for the pickup. Jolly Green 21 also dropped his auxiliary fuel tanks out in the jungle, reduced his fuel load so as to allow himself to hover on a ground affect. He moved in over the LZ and established a 150 to perhaps 200-foot hover and hoisted from above the trees. He hoisted six people. I repeat; he hoisted six people up into his aircraft. He backed out of the area and flew back toward Da Nang. At this point I do not remember if Jolly Green 25 and 21 took their survivors to the NSA hospital or back to Da Nang . It is probably irrelevant at this point. I'd like to remind that all of this was being done now in the dark under flares being dropped from an airplane at 9,000 feet. The mountainous area where we were had the top of the mountains at 4,000 feet and our rescue site; the disaster site, the crash site, was at about 2,500 feet; half way up this mountain.

Next, Jolly Green 10 moved in for his approach and you recall he had already taken his auxiliary tanks off at Da Nang before proceeding to the crash site. Jolly Green 10 experienced a little difficulty finding the LZ because he had not been there previously. He had not obtained a good fix on it [visually]. Flares and a strobe light were used to guide him in. He came in, and as he was I noticed a very large cloud of white smoke coming out of the jungle on his right. He said . . . the pilot also said he noticed it and thought it was a flare burning in the jungle. I thought it was an artillery piece Smoke Marker used as a range finder. Regardless, at this point it has not been resolved as of yet. Jolly Green 10 was piloted by Major Verndander. His co-pilot was Captain Dick Ying.

They moved in over the LZ, established a high hover over the trees as the other aircraft had done and picked up four survivors. At this time "Quiz Master", on the ground, informed all those on his frequency that no more survivors could be picked up by tree penetrator until the litter cases were picked up. By this time I was back on-scene. I heard this conversation and I had the litters aboard, so the next obvious thing to do was for me to make my second approach. We dumped our fuel down so it would reduce our gross weight to allow us to safely operate in the area, and as these last few incidents between Jolly Green 10, "Quiz Master" and Jolly Green 28 were occurring, weather again formed over the Landing Zone. This was partly attributed to the smoke from the flares. Many flares had been dropped. Much smoke had come into the area and probably this smoke constituted condensation nuclei, which aided in the forming of clouds and or fog over the LZ. Very soon the area was completely overcast again as it had been when myself and my crew in Jolly Green 28 and Jolly Green 21 had first

arrived late in the afternoon. I felt that if the clouds had gone away late in the afternoon permitting us to make this many rescues that perhaps it would go away again if we just waited around long enough, and we had the fuel to do this and we had the airplanes to do this. The flares were still coming down. I informed "Quiz Master" of the situation and decided that I would make an attempt to get in underneath the clouds. Previously I had also done this and in each case my first attempt to get in underneath the clouds by going down a valley did not prove fruitful. We found that we just couldn't get in under the clouds that way. On this next approach when I had the litters I decided to try a new tech. As had been previously stated, the LZ was about half way up this steep mountain. The mountain slope was variously estimated between 30 and 60 degrees. The top of the mountain appeared to be almost vertically coming down. Then, about a third of the way down, starting to slope itself and farther on down the slope, then was the LZ. I informed "Quiz Master" that I was going to try an approach and asked him to listen for me. I came around the mountain under the flares. Incidentally, while all aircraft were flying under the flares, after the flares would burn out, the parachutes would still be descending and there was nothing on these parachutes to illuminate them, so all aircraft were continually flying around and taking quick evasive maneuvers to avoid flying into these parachutes that were unlighted. The lighted flares presented less of a problem because of their brilliance and were easy to vector around.

The "Quiz Master" listened for my approach. I flew the helicopter as though I was going to fly into the mountain. I let the helicopter down near the face of the mountain. I informed my crew to use a rescue light on the right side of the helicopter to shine out under the rotor blades on the right side, directing my co-pilot to shine the searchlight from the nose over to the left side to check on the blades on the left side. I turned on my forward and downward looking landing light for forward illumination. I turned on my floodlights for downward illumination. Almost in a hover but still in translational life, I let the aircraft down toward the face of the mountain. The clouds came right up to the face of the mountain and my objective was to try to let the aircraft down slowly between the face of the mountain and between the clouds, or into the clouds. We slowly approached the face of the mountain and then turned the helicopter so as the face of the mountain was on our right shoulder and we let down right over the top of the trees. The slope then fell away to our left. With all the lights on we could see the trees very well and therefore we had good clearance. I informed the co-pilot to start sweeping the nose spotlight back and forth. This then would help keep us oriented. He did this and he did a fine job of it and we were able to keep oriented all the way down. We simply hovered down the face of the mountain in translational lift. Our path then was obliquely across the face of the mountain with the final bottom portion of it designed to bring us near the LZ. At all times we could look out and see the trees on our right and then the slope falling off steeply to the left into the clouds. Actually the slope fell away under us into the clouds. We could see nothing on the left but we knew that the slope was down there falling away. Nearly down at the bottom of the approach "Quiz Master" told me that he heard me, that my position was dust, and so from him I was able to turn the aircraft then toward him, still descending slowly; still creeping in toward the LZ, and we had long since then been down under the clouds but the lights aided us in seeing the trees and by seeing the trees we could clear all the obstacles. We simply hovered over the tops of the jungle trees down underneath the clouds. This seemed to be the best answer to me. "Quiz Master" kept telling us to fly a little bit more in one direction then a little bit more in the next, and it wasn't a minute or two later before we were right over the LZ. We were hovering and we were high. We made a rudder turn almost on the spot from the high hover and then the crew and I worked the helicopter straight down again vertically 200 feet, down over the LZ, and

then forward under the trees again. Still hovering we were able to get the helicopter down slightly lower than last time because we were somewhat familiar with the area by this time.

We lowered Sergeant Baker, then the litters, down to the ground. He did a fine job getting the patients ready and the litters, and we expedited getting the litter patients up and all of them were hoisted with no problems. The crew did a fine job. Then we brought Sgt Baker back up and we had been in a hover approximately 15 or 20 minutes and brought up five litter patients. Again, the crew, with all the lights on, helped me back the helicopter out from under the trees and then rise up straight vertically, then again we executed at a least a 90 degree turn. We were unable to go forward because that was the face of the mountain. We were not too sure of going backwards because the trees were up in the clouds and we couldn't see many trees then in the clouds. We approached the clouds, immediately went IFR; executed an IFR climb, and the co-pilot kept me on heading by issuing me reminders not to go too far to the left because that was the mountain. We only hoped that we would not climb out and strike one of the parachute flares coming down. We broke out on top. Everything seemed in fine shape and we headed back for Da Nang.

We decided not to go to NSA with our litter patients because our fuel was just too low and Da Nang was the best answer for fuel. We would be forced to transport the litter patients by some other means to the best hospital. While enroute "Queen" told us to land at Da Nang with our patients and put the litters aboard Jolly Green 10 who had landed already at Da Nang and by so doing this was another fine bit of coordination. It helped the mission immeasurably.

Then Jolly Green 21 made his approach. I can only presume that this was also a hazardous approach because as I left it was IFR. Major Anderson and crew, again, hoisted six people from a high hover above the trees and his report shows that while he was doing this parts of the clouds were coming down through his rotors and it made visibility very difficult in the hover and it made it very difficult to maintain a hover and see hover references off the trees. It was an extremely commendable approach; an extremely commendable hover, hoist and rescue. He came out of there IFR also and by this time Jolly Green 25; Major Winfield, was back in the area. Major Anderson in Jolly Green 21, when climbing out, advised "Queen" that the LZ and the rescue zone was IFR and Jolly Green 21 recommended no more approaches. I was just getting ready to take off and I appraised "Queen" that I could find a way back in and I was requesting to make another approach, especially since Jolly Green 21 had informed "Queen" that there were still six people left. I didn't want to leave these people. "Queen" told me that my request would be disapproved. Jolly Green 21 started back. "Queen" was anticipating bringing all the forces back and I took off for the rescue zone. I felt that if there's any way of talking anybody into this I wanted to do it enroute and be making tracks toward the rescue zone. Jolly Green 25 was on his way back. Jolly Green 21 was on his way back and we still had six people in there and I wanted to make an attempt. Our Control called me. The squadron CO called me on HF and asked me what I thought. I told him what I thought. I based my opinion on the fact that the weather had cleared in the afternoon and that we could keep airplanes up there and hope for a break, and still go in and make a rescue. "Queen" disapproved this. The squadron CO stated that with the temperature and dew point being what it was late in the evening, that he felt that there would be no breaks. Reluctantly I had to concur with his thinking. I was then ordered to return to Da Nang, which I did, but I still felt bad about leaving six people up in the LZ.

All of the Jolly Green helicopters did a fine job and were subsequently told that the next morning at first light the Marines were going to attempt to bring out the remaining six. It was my opinion that the Jolly Greens should go in and pick them up because the Jolly Greens were more conversant with the area.

As of this date I do not know the final outcome of the case. I can only commend all the Jolly Greens for doing an outstanding job. I commend my co-pilot. I commend my crew. I commend Jolly Green 21 and its crew. These people did an outstanding and professional job. Through their efforts on that night of 12 May the Jolly Greens were able to bring out 29 survivors. All but four were brought out in the dead of night, under flares, from an extremely hazardous flying area.

Normally when we go on any rescue we have the SPADs; A1-E, fixed-wing aircraft, go with us as escorts. They're invaluable. However on this rescue this night, as we were departing Da Nang and the rocket attack hit the base, the SPAD's aircraft - not the pilots - were injured by shrapnel. They could not fly out away from the base so we accomplished the entire rescue that night without the aid of the SPADs. Still in all it's a good feeling to know that with the four helicopters involved we were able to pick up 29 survivors. I picked up nine. The other helicopter in my flight picked up 12 and the other two helicopters picked up four or five apiece.

The next rescue was accomplished by Fred Audie in the low helicopter and Lance Eagan; a Coast Guard pilot, in the high helicopter. It is an excerpt of a radio broadcast although the Jolly Green pilots are not mentioned specifically by name.

"As I'm up above the cliff and . . . [inaudible] . . . there was one fellow shooting at me from two trees that was laying down on his side with about four inches in between and I could see his head come up between them, and it looked like a pistol he was sticking through these two logs and shooting. But by then I'd fired maybe 20 or 30 rounds from a 38 and I had pretty well zeroed in and knew where it was shooting and using tracers. So the next time the bomb went off I was waiting for him and he pulled his head up and I fired one round down there and he didn't shoot again."

BROADCASTER: "The Major saw that he was going to have to shift to the offensive if he was going to still be around when the Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopters got there."

"They devised a plan; when the bombs hit off and they ducked I let out a yell and jumped toward them from my position, which was in a ravine on a little ledge, and landed, oh, maybe halfway between. When they heard the yell and saw me coming, instead of shooting they turned and ran. One of them tripped and fell. I shot him and here the other two had already made it into the jungle and just as they made it to the jungle another bomb went off at the edge of it, and again, about 20 yards, maybe 30 yards from me, and I saw one of them flying through the air and that was the last I got fired on. There were three bodies and then nobody else was in the ravine.

BROADCASTER: "With the immediate danger over Major Dwyer turns to the job of getting rescued."

"I decided that I'd try and get a little further up the hill to give them a better chance to pick me up because it was quite steep and there were these jagged tree trunks in that area. So I started crawling up the hill. I got up where the ravine was about a foot deep, and just laying on my back where I could see above my head - and I lay off to the side of the ravine where I could see down the ravine and nobody else had come into it; in the jungle and there was nobody above me - the Jolly Greens came in; 10. I talked him in on the radio and when they were over my position of course they could see me laying out prone on the ground and there was no trouble. They let the tree penetrator down. It hit the ground maybe 10 yards, 15 yards from me; a little bit down the hill and off to the side, and as the penetrator hit the ground I stood up and started to run for it and at that time we did get some small arms and light automatic weapons fire. I grabbed the tree penetrator, opened the seat and the next thing I know I was in the helicopter."

BROADCASTER: "How long had it all taken? The Plymouth, Pennsylvania native said he thought it was maybe the better part of an hour before the Jolly Greens came for him. Now this is what the Major thinks of his friends and the fighters, and most of all, of his friends who rescued him."

"By that time Phil Maywall, up in the backup plane, had been working the area over and summing it up and I was in the field, and he just proceeded to drop all the ordnance he could get on the edge of this field, and the fighter pilot did a superb job of hitting the edge of the field without hitting me. By the time the Jolly Greens had gotten there, which I believe was the better part of an hour after I was on the ground, the enemy had plenty of time to get in position and these people had a lot of guts to go in the way they did getting as much ground fire as they were getting. I could hear the shells; I could hear some explosive shells going off, and I could see the tracers just all over up there. The Jolly was hit badly. He made one attempt. He was hit in the hoist. He came back in and took many, many, hits and did a fine job, and I knew when I saw the number of hits and tracers on that second one that they weren't going to get me. And as the last Jolly that came in to pick me up I could hear the gunfire. I told him when he was coming in he was starting to get shot at. Both guns were shooting out of the helicopter and it was just amazing to me how well they can do under that much fire."

The rescue you have just heard occurred on about the 21st of May, 1968.

Another rescue in which I took part occurred on the 25th of April 1968. We were at Quang Tri. Jerry Griggs was in the low bird and I was in the high bird. We were told to go to a point very far west from Quang Tri because an airplane had been shot down. There was a survivor and the survivor was talking to someone in some of the airplanes orbiting the area. We departed and climbed as high as we could because we would have to fly over hostile territory and it was determined that the position of the downed pilot was in Laos. As we crossed the boarder we were able to talk to people on-scene. There were FACs and also other fixed wing airplanes, which were SPADs. We determined that the pilot on the ground was a SPAD driver. In getting to the area we assisted the high bird as much as possible and my co-pilot; Captain Ron Spray, did an outstanding job assisting me and keeping us away from high threat areas. Once there the low bird; Jerry Greggs, talked to the survivor. The survivor did an outstanding job on the radio and then Jerry went down from altitude to make the pickup while the FACs and the SPADs circled protectively. I remained high as high bird. Jerry picked up the survivor and then we, very surprisingly, determined that it was Colonel Schultz. Colonel Schultz was one of the

SPAD drivers who we had known here at Da Nang. I do not recall the particulars of Colonel Schultz' mission but it is nice to know that we can pick up those that help us.

On our way back again, Ron Spray did an outstanding job and one of the things that stands out in my mind is when Jerry Griggs made a turn to go in a certain direction, Ron said, "If he goes that way he's going to get shot at." We relayed similar information to Jerry and Jerry altered his course and fortunately we were able to make the pickup and get back without being shot at. That is to say as far as we know we were not shot at. But after all it took some kind of shot to bring down Colonel Schultz in the first place.

A rescue attempt in which I was involved and which I feel significant, occurred on the 31st of May, 1968. On that day I had been scheduled for an orbit flight to remain in a position to assist people who may need to be rescued during certain parts of the day. The orbit is scheduled to coincide with heavy activity. I had accomplished my orbit, had refueled in the air from a tanker and was on my way back to the home station and I had just passed Tiger Island, which is an enemy stronghold. We always give Tiger Island a wide berth because we know the hostile activity . . . [inaudible section] . . . the time . . . [inaudible section] . . . I was informed by a radar GCI site on Guard, plus our controlling agency, that an aircraft with a call sign of "No Trump Lead" had been shot down over Tiger Island and the pilot had bailed out. I was instructed . . . [inaudible section] . . . ten miles away and I turned toward Tiger Island heading directly for it. The way the voice communications to me sounded was that the pilot still maybe coming down in his parachute. So as I approached the island I was looking up to see if I could spot the . . . [inaudible section] . . . Also I could see airplanes milling about in the vicinity of Tiger Island. I contacted them and one was a FAC and one was the wingman of "No Trump", with a call sign of "No Trump II". "No Trump II" informed all the aircraft present that he was at 7,000 feet and that in the near past he had seen "No Trump Lead" bail out, had a good parachute, and he claimed he saw "No Trump Lead" getting into a life raft in the water. I find this highly speculative. "No Trump II" said he had to leave the scene because he had low fuel. I told "No Trump II" before he left to make a low pass over the water in the vicinity of the man in the raft and he could then identify the spot for me that way and I could come in and make the pickup. However, "No Trump II" would not do this. He gave no reason why he would not do this. He also said that he had lost sight of the survivor. I felt that even a low pass in the general vicinity within a mile of where he felt the survivor was would help us in our search and we could probably find the survivor. I then asked "No Trump II" to pass the information on the man's position to another aircraft in the vicinity with more fuel and then let that aircraft identify the spot for me. "No Trump II" did not do this. Perhaps he had good reasons but I feel that through the lack of coordination and information passed by "No Trump II", this mission was greatly compromised. There were a lot of other aircraft in the vicinity. We received no less than four positions greatly varying in distance for the position of the survivor. In other words we had no localized search area but it was extremely drawn out and various.

I was the first helicopter on-scene. Other helicopters were called from Quang Tri, which was not too far in the distance. All the helicopters called were Jolly Green helicopters. As the first helicopter there I commenced a low level over-water search in the most likely areas. It proved fruitless. During my search on the southeast corner of Tiger Island a 50-caliber machine gun opened up on my helicopter. The azimuth of the machine gun was very accurate but the bullets splashed on either side of us. They even went out away from the island; on the other side of the island, on the far side of my helicopter away from the island but they didn't go too

far. Apparently I was just barely in range and the gunners on the island were attempting to throw a stray shot into our helicopter. My crew noticed this and we pulled away. I would say that we were somewhere between one mile and a half mile close to the island. We continued our search in all areas around the island knowing that we might get shot at, but we feared that if the pilot was down and if his drift carried him near the island, that he was in danger. We felt that the risk was calculated if we did not get in too close to the island. Later we proceeded around to the north side of the island and on the northwest corner, as we were searching, my co-pilot looked in toward the island and drew back away from the aircraft window as though it was an involuntary reaction. He said, "They're shooting at us", and I pulled away. Again, the gunners had no trouble with their azimuth. The bullets splashed on either side of us and we were able to pull out of range within seconds. We were probably just barely within range of their guns. Later on in the search on the southwest corner I could look into the island and see the 50-caliber muzzle flashes as they shot bullets out toward us. These were three times that I know we got shot at. We were never hit and several other times we noted splashes in the water, which were not very near us. The fast movers and the SPADs who got on-scene, started dropping ordnance and fire suppression strikes on the island. Some of the SPADs took hits. All this confirmed that "No Trump Lead" had definitely been hit over the island and it's difficult to say what his condition was. There was never a parachute beeper heard from him. There was never a voice contact with him and it is doubtful at this time that he survived the bailout. All the search aircraft stayed in the area until after dark at which time weather came in very low and the search had to be called off. The survivor, or what we hoped would be a survivor, was never heard from nor found. As a sideline, the area was teeming with sharks and if the man was in the water, not in a raft, it is doubtful that he could have survived even in the water.

Another rescue in which I was involved occurred on the 4th of May, 1968. It involved two of our helicopters from our squadron. The first received battle damage on a rescue in Ashau Valley in that it partially lost power, smashed into the trees, breaking out one of the windows, injuring the sponson, and I understand getting some tree limbs in the engine. The second, which assisted the first helicopter back to another part of the Ashau Valley, subsequently crashed on takeoff. Both helicopters ended up at a place called Ta Bat in the Ashau Valley. Why their mission started is not important here.

I walked in the squadron when I found that both of our helicopters were down in the Ashau Valley. I thought they might be short handed at the squadron so I told them that I was available as an Aircraft Commander if I was needed. Shortly thereafter I was told that I had a crew and that I would go to Ashau Valley and pickup the two crews from the crashed helicopters. I took off from here as a sole helicopter, escorted by two SPADs, which I was very glad to have.

Enroute one of our other helicopters flown by John Hannon met me. John had been one of the first helicopters into assist our two helicopters at Ta Bat in the Ashau Valley, so John knew the way in and the way out. I followed John. We made a long letdown from over the clouds and descended into the Ashau Valley. At anytime I expected to take some sort of hostile ground fire, however none occurred. I was amazed to see the site was almost completely torn up by artillery shells that had fallen sometime in the past. There was almost no flat area at Ta Bat and Ta Bat itself was really nothing more than a wide spot in the valley with a few Army and Marine tents.

The first helicopter, flown by John Hannon, landed in what was a somewhat flat area and I was unable to find anything really flat so I put my helicopter down between craters, perhaps even straddling one or two, and I had received orders on what to do at the site. I was the one carrying the orders. We were to strip the helicopters and bring the people back and as much equipment as we could, and then try to get a Sikorsky Sky Crane into the area, which would bring up the rest of the helicopter. My chief concern was not the helicopters but the people. Therefore when I got to the site the instructions I passed to the survivors, and our crew members was, "Get the people ready to go in the two flyable helicopters", meaning John Hannon's helicopter and mine. "After the people are ready to go, let's transfer personal gear and perhaps some survival gear. After all this is done and the people are ready to move out, in case we're attacked, then we would start the work of stripping down the helicopter." That's basically the way it worked and I informed the "Crown Aircraft" and "Queen" of what we were doing. We had to shut completely down on the ground because we did not want to burn out our APU, so we mounted guards.

I was very happy we brought additional drinking water for the crews that were there because they needed it. All of us took either handguns or rifles. I stayed in my aircraft and the rest of the crewmembers got out to assist as much as possible. The crews got themselves ready. They transferred their gear and their survival equipment, then went to work stripping the other two helicopters. The work was accomplished in an amazingly short period of time to my thinking. The people must have really done a good job stripping down the helicopters.

As it worked out, John Hannon and I were able to take off with all the survivors and crewmembers plus their personal gear, plus survival equipment, and we went back to Hue Phu Bai and refueled, picked up some more survivors, which had been taken there; also crewmembers, and then returned to Da Nang. As far as we know we never got shot at. The next day the two helicopters, which had crashed at Ta Bat, were flown out by a Sikorsky Sky Crane.

Another rescue in which I took part occurred on the 2nd of May. I was on Home Alert. I was standing duty as a co-pilot, not as an RCC, and the pilot was Captain Paul Ashley. We were the Number One Alert Crew and early in the day we were told about a pending mission. Eventually Number Two Alert Crew was brought into the mission also, plus a third standby crew. We knew that a FAC; that is a Forward Air Controller aircraft, had crashed near the Ashau Valley. The exact spot was not known to us. We did not know if there was a survivor at the crash site although the crash had occurred about five days previous to our mission. We received an intelligence briefing, which was not very encouraging and we decided to go to the Army for another intelligence briefing, which we did. The Army site was north of Hue. We got out there about noon, received their briefing and found a few more bits of discouraging intelligence and then took off for the scene.

The Alert Bird Number One and the Alert Bird Number Two departed with a third standby crew staying at the Army site. We picked up SPAD escorts enroute. We had several choices to make to get to the site. We could go south around artillery or we could north around hostile artillery. Either way it would bring us in over Ashau Valley. Not only did we have to contend with hostile artillery but in order to get there we had bad weather to contend with. While we were trying to get around the bad weather we found that we were also flying through artillery thrown up by our own people. They did not know we were there. They were not shooting at

us as airborne targets. They were shelling hostile troops on the ground. We just happened to be flying through where their shells were going. It was either that or not accomplish the mission at all.

Finally we got to the area. We could not see the ground because we were flying so high and in the weather. The SPADs found the place on the ground. We let down at the only available space and found ourselves directly in the Ashau Valley, which was very surprising to us. Strangely enough it was Ta Bat.

Being the first and lead aircraft we came down first, found what we thought was a safe site; that being Ta Bat, then called down a second airplane, which was flown by Lieutenant Lance Eagan of the Coast Guard, and his co-pilot was Captain Bob Hicks. Paul Ashley, our pilot, decided to follow the SPADs immediately because of the bad weather. The weather was very low. We had to fly down a road, which is always dangerous in hostile territory. We had to fly between mountains because that's the only way we could see, and right over us was the low overcast.

We found the spot very quickly. This was due only to the SPADs going in first and finding it. We had no idea if there were hostile troops on the ground near the spot.

Paul handled the crew very well.

We came near the spot. We dropped a smoke flare, which did not tell us very much because of the wind around the mountain itself. We got a good view of the crash site, which was on a side of very steep hill near the top and the trees all around the crash site were conservatively estimated at 150 feet. Being unable to tell the direction of the wind Paul simply chose a convenient heading for terrain, which would allow the helicopter to get out as best as possible, went into a hover and immediately lowered two PJs, which we brought along to observe the crash site. We jettisoned our drop tanks. We dumped a load of fuel. The PJs were going down. They were on the ground. They started to investigate the crash site. They had a survival radio with them. All this time we were talking to the SPADs and communicating with the Number 2 airplane, which had held back down in the valley at Ta Bat, and a lot of the communications from the two helicopters was going back to Number 3 Helicopter back at the Army site. The third helicopter then was relaying it to the higher commands.

The PJs had been at the crash site only about two or three minutes when the SPADs said, "The weather's getting too bad. We simply cannot stay here any longer. We suggest the helicopters come out." We told the PJs on the ground. We came back around for the pickup. All this time the weather was deteriorating extremely fast. The SPADs had to leave. We had to accomplish the pickup of our own PJs with no escort whatsoever. As far as we know we did not take any hostile fire. The PJs did not hear any hostile activity on the ground. The information obtained by the PJs was sufficient to determine that the pilot was dead and other information that we were asked to obtain was either obtained or that information which we were able to give from the investigation satisfied the higher commands.

We flew out down the valley along the road again under the clouds, between the mountains and just over the trees. The SPADs gave us vectors. The other helicopter gave us vectors. We came out to debant and picked up the second helicopter. The SPADs were already

climbing through the weather and then we commenced to climb through the weather. We climbed up to approximately 10,000 feet. We were still in the weather. We obtained IFR flight plans, radar vectors and went back to Hue for refueling. This is about all that is known by any of us on the crews about this mission. We do not know who directed this mission. We do not know why we investigated a crash site. We only know that the answers we brought back satisfied someone up the line. We were happy to be of service.

Another mission in which I took part occurred on 21 April, 1968. I was in the barracks. A phone call came to the barracks asking for a volunteer crew; a makeup crew, to go on a rescue. I volunteered to be the RCC. I was told to come down to Squadron immediately. Once at Squadron I was told that I was going to have to be the co-pilot rather than the RCC. I was a little bit dejected but perhaps it was the best thing for me. Realizing it would be a valuable experience I went as the co-pilot. As it turned out a rescue was already in progress and I was to be in the Number Three helicopter to make a rescue attempt.

The first helicopter had gone into the site and was shot up. It had to depart due to hostile activity. At the site there were eight Army men. They had crashed in two helicopters. After crashing they scrambled out of the helicopters, none of which were hurt too badly, got to some high ground and set up a defense perimeter and had been there all night.

After our first helicopter was driven off the second helicopter was in good shape but by itself, the second helicopter had called for a third helicopter and that was our helicopter. The pilot with me was Hank Cronnet. He was from NKP. He was TDY here in our squadron. The place of the rescue was called "Happy Valley", which certainly is a misnomer.

We departed with one SPAD. There were two SPADs already there We climbed out at high altitude and after about 20 miles we were holding and then we got the word from the Number 2 helicopter on the scene to come on down and we'd go in. We did . The Number 2 bird went on in. The Number 1 bird had already gone back to Da Nang. The Number 2 helicopter went in, flown by John Oliver, picked up four survivors from a high hover over the trees.

The survivor did an outstanding job of communicating and letting their position be known to John Oliver and his crew. When John Oliver departed the scene he said he experienced ground fire. We came in, went into a high hover, and our FE; Sergeant Greeper, picked up the remaining four survivors. Cronnet did a good job of flying the helicopter. I handled the communications, and the SPADs and the gunships did an outstanding job of keeping the enemy at bay. One of the SPAD drivers killed an enemy soldier only ten meters from one of our friendly survivors on the ground. This was done of course while the SPAD was making a strafing run. That's how close in the SPADs can get and that's how good a job they do."

**END**