

HC-7 RESCUE 129⁽¹⁾ 23-Dec-1972 (Saturday)

HH-3A Sikorsky Seaking helo Det 110 Big Mother #63
USS Horne (DLG-30) Combat Day ⁽²⁾
0.4 miles off North Vietnam island
Water: 70° Air: 72° Wind: 8-12 knots Sea State: 2

Pilot – LT	Craig A. Peterson
Co-pilot – LT	Timothy A. Trotter
1st crew – ADJ-3	Gary L. Paul
2nd crew – AT-2	Thomas M. McCann

Rescue Report; ⁽²⁾⁽³⁾

Alert Received - 17:16- Ship's 1MC
Vehicle Departed – 17:21 – 38 Miles –
Arrived on Scene – 17:40 – Held 5 minutes for RESCAP
Located Survivor – 17:45 – Vectors from OSC and Survivors smoke
Begin Retrieval – 17:46 – Put swimmer in water, hoisted swimmer & survivor
Ended Retrieval – 17:51 -
Survivor Disembarked – 18:20 – USS Horne (DLG-30)
Total SAR time – this vehicle 1 hours – 04 minutes.

F-4J Phantom (Shamrock 210) ⁽⁶⁾ (AJ-210) 153885
(Fighting Shamrocks) VMFA-333, USMC,
USS America (CVA-66)

Lt Col John K. Cochran ⁽³⁾⁽¹²⁾
Maj Henry S. Carr III ⁽³⁾⁽¹²⁾

The CO of VMFA-333 assigned to escort a photographic reconnaissance aircraft on a mission over the North Vietnamese coast. The mission was to obtain intelligence on the location of the North Vietnamese Navy's torpedo boats, which could potentially pose a threat to TF 77 operations in the Gulf of Tonkin. The Phantom was hit in the tail by 85mm flak and badly damaged as the aircraft was flying over one of the many groups of islands off the coast near Hon Gay. A fuel cell was ruptured and the aircraft caught fire. Moments later the crew ejected and landed in the sea about 15 miles southeast of Hon Gay from where they were rescued by a Navy

HH-3A SAR helicopter. Lt Col Cochran returned to the USA for hospitalization for back injuries and command of the Squadron passed to Maj Lee Lasseter who had survived being shot down on 11 September. ⁽⁵⁾

“17:13 set flight quarters for SAR alert, downed pilot bearing 010 at 21 miles. 17:21 launched helo Big Mother 63. 17:22 set course 010, set speed 25 knots. Preceding to station five miles radius of 20°15’N, 107°20’E in company with USS L.F. MASON (DD-852). 18:16 received helo Big Mother 63 with Cochran, John K. LTCOL USMC, VMFA-333, USS America onboard and CARR, Henry S. III, MAJ, VMFA-333, USS America onboard. Both men taken to the medical officer for treatment of injuries. LTCOL Cochran suffered a severe back strain, prognosis – good. MAJ Carr received second degree burns on face and neck, prognosis – good.”
(12)

“17:13 received report that aircraft bureau number 153885 was hit and went into the water at 20.47N, 107.21E. Both LtCol John K. Cochran and Maj Henry S. Carr III were subsequently rescued. Extent of injuries are unknown.”
(13)

“A Navy Superstar: Helo Man Decorated for Viet Heroism” ⁽⁷⁾

Thomas McCann – received Silver Star (Rescue 129) and DFC (Rescue 112)
“I am over whelmed! I was just doing my job.” .. “This is the proudest day of my life!”

NARRATIVE OF RESCUE EPISODE ⁽³⁾

Big Mother 63 was positioned on board OSWALD the USS HORNE (DLG-30) in a standard 15-minute alert status. At 17:16 word was passed over the 1-MC to launch Big Mother 63. This started the helo crew and flight deck crew back to the aircraft. Approximately one minute later, a SAR launch was called. Both the flight deck crew and flight crew expedited and were waiting for a green deck for winds two minutes later. CIC aboard the HORNE had plotted the pilots down position on a large detailed map, folded it to cockpit size and had a runner deliver it to the aircraft by the time the aircraft was engaged. Winds for launch were approximately 10 STRB at 20 knots in order to hasten getting us off the deck. It should be noted that earlier that day, the HORNE and Big Mother 63 had evaluated several winds including those to starboard for the HH-3A, DLG-26 ships SAR launch/recovery flight envelopes.

Launch was SAR COMMON (button 5) with SAR SECONDARY (282.8) as a backup and GUARD being monitored. BIG MOTHER 63 was vectored north 33 miles where a five minute orbit was established while RESCAP was closing the area. During the orbit the On-Scene-Commander an A-5 off the USS AMERICA described the area and the fire which could be expected, AAA, coastal defense guns, small arms, and 81mm. An A-6 tanker with 20mm joined the On-Scene-Commander to provide some support until RESCAP arrived. With RESCAP 40 miles out and BIG MOTHER 63 five miles from the beach and survivors not in sight and no voice communication with the survivors, heavy small arms and automatic weapons opened up on the helo. The coastal defense guns got off a few rounds but RESCAP had arrived and silenced

them in short order. At one mile from feet dry we started a turnout of the area since we hadn't sighted the survivors and the intensity of fire had increased. At this point a smoke was spotted 2000 yards off the beach and the crew went into the rescue routine. Altitude and airspeed which had been 120 knots and 40 feet was lowered to about 20 feet and 100 knots. The swimmer moved aft to the cargo door area from his forward M-60 position. Everyone was calling small arms fire as though it was being directed at his position in the aircraft alone. The survivors were about 200 yards apart and at 10 foot and 10 knots swimmer drop was made to the farthest south (survivor). A left hand turn was made away from the direction of fire. By the time the 360 was made the swimmer was signaling for pick-up. A fast approach and a low 15 foot hover about one second for hookup was made and the aircraft moved out again making a left hand turn.

After the first pick-up it had been planned to exit the area but the On-Scene-Commander called that Bib Mother 67 was still about five miles out and closing. With the amount of fire the survivors were taking and the fact that the aircraft and crew were still functioning the swimmer was positioned for a second drop. Initial line up was made on the first survivors raft but was rectified upon seeing the second survivor splashing water next to his raft off to the right. The 10 and 10 went perfectly and again a left hand turn was made. During the turn ADJ3 PAUL the first crewman reported we had taken a hit near his position. The hover and pick-up didn't go as smoothly as the first taking about 4-6 seconds. Two left corrections during the hover were given the final one being made by LT TROTTER, the copilot. When the swimmer and survivor were out of the water airspeed was picked up and a turn started. Just as the swimmer and survivor were being pulled in a large round, possibly 81mm went off several yards to the right shacking the whole aircraft. Exit from the area was made with hast.

Condition of the survivors was made while inbound to OSWALD the USS HORNE (DLG-30) with an alert to have a doctor waiting. A normal landing was made.

Post flight inspection revealed the aircraft had taken five small arms hits. One through a tail rotor blade, one into the armored PAX door below the M-60, one through the fiberglass housing next to the Thomas coupling at the tail rotor gear box, and two creases at the nose compartment and aft of the cargo door.

STATEMENT of pilot - **Peterson** ⁽³⁾

The narrative and other crewmember statements contain the sequence and action that took place. This statement will contain things that were done or not done that will be beneficial at least to me in the future combat SAR rescues, and statements on crew performance. • First off the speed in which the rescue was accomplished, from drinking a cup of coffee in the wardroom to back in the wardroom was only one hour and four minutes, shows that all parties concerned, the USS HORNE (NORTH SAR), the A-5 On-Scene-Commander, the E-3B, A07 RESCAP, and A-6 tanker with 20mm who suppressed fire prior to RESAP for the survivors, and BIG MOTHER 63 all knew what to do, when to do it, and had communication. This is the first rescue I've been on where I had excellent communication from launch to recovery and when I asked for something got an immediate answer or at least an acknowledgement. This says quite a bit in itself due to the fact that for a good portion of the time my aircraft was below 40 feet. • Our launch was expedited for three factors, first the deck area of the USS HORNE (DLG-30) is excellent, CIC

launched us on button five and had sent a map to us prior to launch, and finally the bridge gave us a green deck with winds other than standard when LT TROTTER (a test pilot from PAX RIVER told them that we would expect winds 10 degrees to starboard at 20 knots.)

Enroute to the scene the crew readied the aircraft for an opposed pick up. LT TROTTER removed his back seat cushion from his armored seat which I had mentioned to him when we first briefed in San Diego and I didn't, which I regretted through the whole rescue. This gave him about six inches more coverage from small arms. Also en-route we held for about five minutes while RESCAP was closing, during this time the On-Scene-Commander briefed all concerned on what the scene looked like and what type of fire to expect. This determined the direction we approached from, almost due south which kept the helo away from the heaviest shore batteries and at extremely low altitude 20 feet which caused the AAA to be fired over our heads. It was reported that there was a heavy concentration of flak that blanketed the air above the helo upon our arrival at the scene. • From two miles out until we spotted the survivors smoke at less than 2000 yards was the hardest part of the rescue and almost caused me to turn around at one mile when we hadn't sighted anyone. First there had been no voice communication or beeper heard from either survivor that I was aware of and from the fire the On-Scene-Commander had seen them taking he wasn't sure they were still alive. Second, the vectors we were given had us lined up on the survivors and we kept being told they were straight ahead, and all I could see was the beach. Thirdly, from about two miles out, we were under intense small arms fire and frankly, I expected the helo to be riddled with the distinct possibility of at least one of the crewmembers being hit. At one mile, I decided to make a turn and let RESCAP work on the beach line but this never came about since one of the survivors popped a smoke. This committed me to continue. The two swimmer drops and pick-ups went like clockwork with my only regret that the swimmer didn't sink the first survivors raft and I momentarily lined up on it going after the second survivor. • My crew LT TROTTER, ADJ3 PAUL, and AT2 McCANN showed throughout the whole rescue why they are professionals. LT TROTTER saved us two minutes getting off the deck by accepting winds we had previously tested in the HH-3A SAR launch/recovery flight envelope evaluation, while I was still going over checklists. Though not a normal HC-7 copilot he showed his professionalism by not missing an item he had been briefed on. During the actual rescue phase he handled all radio communications, monitored the gages, power, altitude and airspeed. I distinctly remember several altitude calls which I followed by lowering the collective, I was up to 40 feet. During the second hover and pick-up he quickly realized I had fixated on something when I didn't respond to several left corrections by the crewman and applied left cyclic to facilitate the pick-up. The calmness with which he accepted the fire we were under and his expert knowledge of the HH-3A and flying ability were a confidence builder for the whole crew.

ADJ3 PAUL and AT2 McCANN have made rescues in HC-7 before and both are first crewmen. We had previously briefed that McCANN would act as the swimmer. ADJ3 PAUL did a superb job under extremely difficult conditions. The altitude I was flying at made it almost impossible to tell when we were coming up on the survivors for the swimmer drops. I was also making left turns which gave him only seconds to line the aircraft up for the pick-ups, when the survivor and swimmer came into view. The fact that the aircraft received a hit only a foot from him prior to the second pick-up didn't deter his efficiency or calm voice commands. AT2 McCANN as swimmer was outstanding. First once in the cargo door waiting for the drop he had no protection

and I'm sure the bullets in the water looked like they were going to eat him alive. He didn't have much more than 20 seconds to check the survivor over, get him away from the raft and signal for pick-up. The first hook-up took him about a second. By the time he was in the aircraft PAUL was already getting him set up for the second drop. He made another good entry and with the same swiftness was signaling to get picked-up. This time however his survivor was in shock and injured. The hook up took four to six seconds this time through no fault of his own and again he was hauled into the helo on the move where he remanned the forward station. • The reason the aircraft was hit only five times can only be guessed at, one reason was the speed with which we accomplished the pick-ups. Another is RESCAP eliminated the larger caliber opposition, and a third call it luck or a higher power, I appreciate and am thankful for the combined efforts of all who made this a successful rescue.

STATEMENT OF co-pilot – **Trotter** ⁽³⁾

TAD to HC-7 from Flight Test Center, NATC PAX RIVER, MD for the purpose of the HH-3A/DLG Launch – Recovery Envelope Determination.

On 23 December 1972, LT PETERSON, I and out crew were on North SAR, USS HORNE (DLG-30). At approximately 17:15, flight quarters were announced over the ship's IMC. We proceeded directly to the aircraft but did not hurry, as we would have if a SAR launch had been announced. LT PETERSON and I were in the aircraft just putting on our floatation gear when SAR launch came over the IMC. At that point, we expedited and had the rotors engaged in approximately two minutes. • At that point the ship had winds 10 degrees starboard at 20 knots and was maintaining a red deck until she could turn to give us the normal 30 degree port wind. I then told the ship we would except 10 degree starboard at 20 knots because as a result of wind envelope testing I know that was a satisfactory wind. We were immediately given a green deck and launched most expeditiously. • OSWALD vectored us 000/30 NM and we proceeded at max. speed. At this position we were told to orbit until A-7 RESCAP could arrive, we were approximately five miles from the survivors. Home Office CD-2 cleared us in after approximately five minutes of holding. At this point LT PETERSON began flying the aircraft. I loaded my M-16, and removed the back pad from my armor seat for more body protection. One minute after leaving holding we sighted an A-5 overhead and proceeded toward it. At approximately 1 ½ miles off the beach we did not have the survivors in sight, and called for someone to vector us in. The On-Scene-Commander gave us a 20 left followed by a 10 degree right and said "They're right off your nose." We were now approximately one mile off the beach and began taking small arms fire. At about ¾ mile an still no survivor in sight, and by now heavy machine gun fire we about turned around but one of the survivors lit off a smoke. He was on our nose at 1/8 mile. The second survivor was about 100 yards north of him. • LT PETERSON flew the aircraft past the survivor at 10°/10 knots. I watched his altitude and other instruments and also for anyone on the beach directly in front of us. We were taking heavy fire from the hill on our right. • As soon as the swimmer was in the water, we gained speed and started a tight left 360 degree turn. During the turn, I was primarily interested on our altitude and keeping my eye on the swimmer. Anytime we climbed above 25 feet, I would tell the pilot to get down. Our altitude during the turns was about 20 feet. We were around in less than a minute and only hovered for approximately 2 seconds before we moved out with the swimmer and 1st

survivor on the hoist. We repeated the left 360 degree turn, (a right turn would have taken us in closer to the guns) and started for the second survivor. Both LT PETERSON and I momentarily lost sight of the survivor and in fact started back to the raft left by the man we had just picked up. Fortunately, we recognized our mistake almost immediately. The same 10'/10 knots technique was used to put the swimmer in the water at the second survivor. Another low altitude left turn was made, and LT PETERSON brought the aircraft into a hover over the swimmer and survivor. We were taking heavy fire at this time. The water looked as if it were hailing heavily. The pilot overshot slightly to the right. The crewman said move left. At this time we had been in a hover about four seconds. The crewman said move left, again. At this point I took the cyclic and moved the aircraft slightly left. The swimmer hooked up and LT PETERSON broke hover. Total time in hover 6-8 seconds. We proceeded low at 180 degrees at about 100 knots and 20 feet and 81mm shell exploded 20 yards off our nose. The aircraft jerked and oscillated longitudinal several times. I thought we had been hit. But everything looked normal. After that I cleared my M-16 by firing it out the window. It jammed on the last shot. After that, I took the aircraft and proceeded back to OSWALD. LT PETERSON made the landing aboard DLG-30.

- The whole rescue was extremely professional. The A-7 suppressed the 85mm which we later learned had bracketed the survivors in order to get BIG MOTHER. We also found out later from the A-7s heavy flak was being fired at us but was exploding too high. (During the rescue our max altitude was 30 feet.)

STATEMENT of 1st CREWMAN – **Paul** ⁽³⁾

On December 23, 1972 we had a normal day on SAR in Big Mother 63, until 17:15 when they called SAR ALERT aboard USS HORNE. We were off the deck in no more than five minutes and proceeded to the area of the downed pilots. On the way Tom McCANN, our swimmer got into his swim gear and set up the forward M-60 and M-16s, back aft I set up the minigun, and got everything else ready for quick use if needed. I armed the smokes, got the extra gunners belt and Chicago grips ready, and attached a light to the rescue sling, then I informed the pilot that we were ready aft.

- At this time, we were put in a short holding pattern outside of Haiphong Harbor.
- When we were told to proceed, I stationed myself at the cargo door to look for the downed pilots and see if we were taking any enemy fire.
- As soon as LT PETERSON spotted the survivors, smoke McCANN was in the cargo door ready to jump. At about the same time we started to take heavy small arms fire. When we got within twenty feet of the survivor, I informed the pilot we took a hit in the tail section of the aircraft. We dropped Tom into the water and by the time we had made a small 360, Tom was ready with the survivor. I started lowering the hoist as we came in for the pick-up. I dragged the hoist cable through the water to the swimmer and survivor. The swimmer hooked the survivor up then himself, as soon as they were clear of the water, I told the pilot we were clear to go. After the swimmer and survivor were inside the helo and were disconnected, we got ready for the second pilot. In seconds, we were ready and dropped the swimmer in for the next pick-up.
- Again, we made a small-left 360 circle and came in for the swimmer and survivor, and as soon as they were hooked up and clear of the water, we were moving out of the harbor. At the same time, I brought them up the hoist and into the helo. Then reported the condition of the survivors to the pilot LT PETERSON. The rest of the flight back to the USS HORNE was uneventful.
- All the time during the rescue, we were being fired at. At times it looked like it was hailing bullets. We were all lucky no one got hit.

STATEMENT of 2nd CREWMAN – **McCann** ⁽³⁾

(Lines 1-8 are illegible).....(shown portions of)

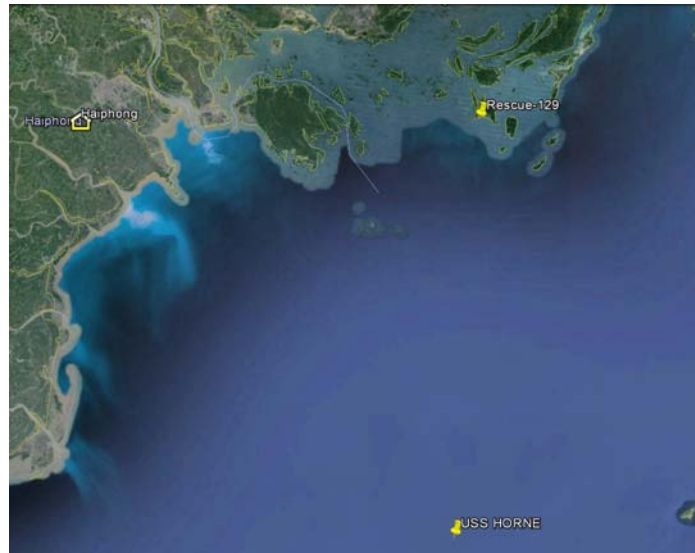
1- On the 23rd of December 1972, I > • 2- aboard BIG MOTHER 63. The day was > •
3- about 17:15. At 17:15 the ship (USS HORNE) set flight quarters and within • 4- two
minutes later they changed it to SAR ALERT. It took us about > • 5- minutes to get off the
deck after they changed it to a SAR. I had > • 6- into my swim gear while the pilots (LT
PETERSON and LT TROTTER) began • 7- starting the engines. We lifted off the deck about
17:20 and proceeded • 8- at max airspeed toward the downed pilots on the way I set up the M-
60

And M-16's while Gary PAUL (1st Crewman) set up the minigun. We got near the mouth of
Haiphong Harbor and orbited for a minute or so to wait for our RESCAP. Then we proceeded to
the downed pilots. As soon as we spotted them I went off ICS and put my fins and mask on and
went to the cargo door waiting to jump. While I was sitting there, I saw splashes from bullets in
the water all around. I was just getting ready to jump when I felt the concussion from a close big
shell on my legs that were dangling out of the helo. I jumped in about 3 feet from Major CARR
and asked him if he was alright, he said he was. I checked to make sure he was disconnected
from his chute and his raft and started pulling him away from his raft. I got him about 20'-25'
from the raft and signaled the helo to come in and pick us up. The helo was over us within 5
seconds and we were on our way up into the helo. As soon as I was back in the helo I
disconnected the Major and myself from the hoist and got back into the door ready to jump
again. The small arms fire from the beach was still incredible. I jumped in and swam up to
LTCOL COCHRAN and checked to see if he was hurt, he said "NO". I checked him over and
pulled him away from his raft, signaled the helo and the helo was over us in no time flat. Just as
we were starting up the hoist a near round from some shore battery knocked us around a little.
Once in the helo I disconnected the Col. and myself and started to help him sit up, he made a
face like he was in pain and I told Gary to inform LT PETERSON the pilot of his (the Col.)
injured back. We headed back for the HORNE at max speed.

All the while I was in the water with the pilots rounds from small arms were hitting all around
us. I still can't figure out how no one got hit.

When we got back to the HORNE we found a hole in a tail rotor blade, a hole in the tail rotor
drive shaft coupling right next to the tail rotor gear box and two places next to the cargo door
where the bullets ricocheted off the helo.

I thought the rescue was one of the best I've been on, everything went smoothly. The downed
pilots were all ready to be picked up. As soon as I gave, the signal to be picked up, the helo was
ready for me and the pilots.



- 1) Numbering as per HC-7 Rescue Log (accumulative rescue number)
- 2) HC-7 Rescue Log
- 3) HC-7 Det 110 Rescue report
- 4) Map – Google Earth
- 5) "Vietnam - Air Losses" By: Chris Hobson (with permission)
- 6) Unclassified Accident Report – B-3-73
- 7) Pacific Stars and Stripes – 10-17-1973 – Thomas McCann – Award ceremony – Cubi Point
- 8) Loss aircraft location data provided by: W. Howard Plunkett (LtCol USAF, retired)
- 10) HC-7 History collection; Ron Milam - Historian
- 12) USS Horne – Deck Log
- 13) USS America – Deck Log

(Compiled / written by: Ron Milam, HC-7 Historian - HC-7, 2-1969 to 7-1970, Det 108 & 113)