

HC-7 RESCUE 15 ⁽¹⁾

16-DEC-1967 (Saturday)

UH-2A Kaman Seasprite Helicopter

HC-7 Detachment 108

Aboard: USS Coontz (DLG-9)

Routine Day ⁽²⁾

12.5 miles off North Vietnam coast

Water: 70° Air: 65° Wind: 12 knots Sea State: 1-2 feet, 10 mile Vis

Pilot – LTJG Timothy S. Melecoski

Co-pilot - LTJG James P. Brennan

1st crew – AMH-2 Gary L. Fleck

2nd crew – ADJ-3 Gary L. Schwake

Alert received - 1300: MAYDAY Transmission on Guard

Vehicle departed - 1300: 10 miles

Arrived on scene - 1310: None

Located survivor - 1310: Vectored to area by Coontz

Begin retrieval - 1313: Survivors descending in parachutes

Ended retrieval – 1315: Rescue was effected

Survivor disembarked –

F-4B, Phantom No. 151492, Squadron VF-21, (Freelancers) USN,
USS Ranger (CVA-61) Call sign – “Sundown 101”

LCDR Diego “Duke” E. Hernandez – HC-7 Rescuer

Ltjg Stephen. L. Van Horn – (RIO)

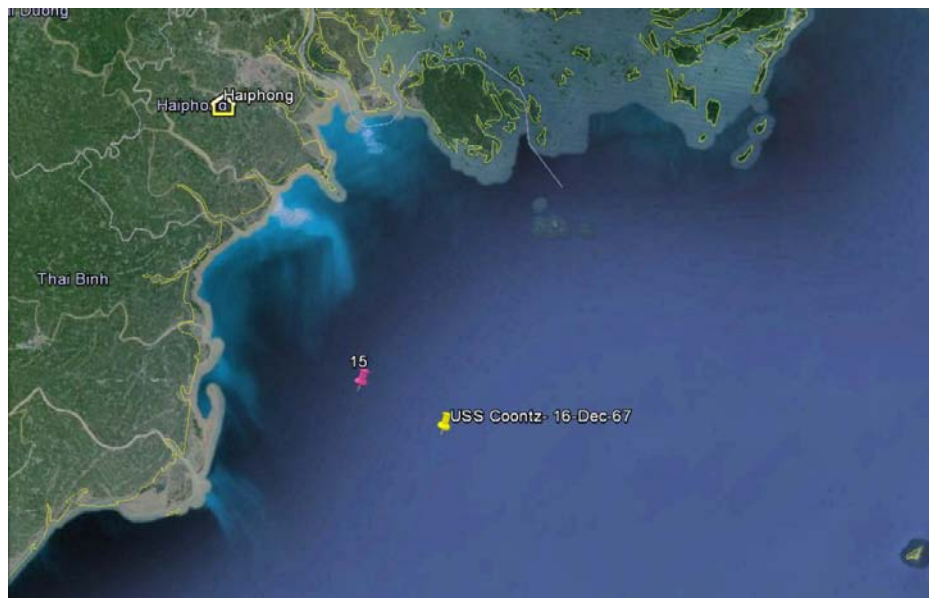
(Rescued by HS-6 Indian Gal - Big Mother Sikorsky SH-3A - combat day, falling flack ⁽³⁾⁽⁷⁾)

The USS Ranger returned to TF 77 for its third war cruise on 3 December. The ship's first combat loss occurred during a raid on a road ferry at Kien An, just south of Haiphong. Lt Cdr Hernandez and Lt Vanhorn were flying as part of the flak suppression flight. As the flight was leaving the target area, systems fail. Controlling the aircraft by rudder alone, Lt Cdr Hernandez steered the aircraft out over the sea and he and his NFO ejected. They were both picked up by a Navy SAR helicopter. LT Cdr Hernandez ejected from another Phantom over the Gulf of Tonkin in 28 April 1968. ⁽⁵⁾

Sundown 101 ⁽⁶⁾, was flying as part of a flak suppression flight. After leaving the target area, south of Haiphong, systems failed. Controlling the aircraft with rudder alone, the crew steers out over the sea and ejects. ⁽⁵⁾ 12:38, Clementine and Big Mother (HS-6) flying in a preposition racetrack route, receive a MAYDAY (13:00 ⁽³⁾) over the guard channel. ⁽³⁾ USS Coontz vectors the helos off the port quarter bearing 295° at 8 miles. The helo crew observes survivors descending in parachutes at 13:13. Hoist operator Fleck, prepares to tap swimmer Schwake (jump signal). Pilot Melecoski flares the H-2, Fleck taps Schwake, and he jumps. Swimmer Schwake assists survivor, checking for entangled chute lines and injuries. 13:15 with the use of “D” rings, Schwake and survivor Hernandez are hoisted to safety. ⁽³⁾ 13:22 Coontz sets the helo detail and recovers SH-3A helo, with LTJG Van Horn, injuries none. One minute later the SH-3A is launched, 13:25 Clementine is recovered with pilot Hernandez, neck and low back injuries. 14:52 Coontz steams toward NSAR area.

Big Mother came under fire from falling shrapnel from airburst which had been following the crippled aircraft. The falling shrapnel hit all around Big Mother, forcing them to take evasive action to get out from under the crippled fighter. ⁽⁷⁾ After the two pilots ejected, Clementine and Big Mother swept in for the pick-ups. ^{(5) (7)}

LCDR Diego “Duke” E. Hernandez would be rescued by HC-7 (#34) a second time 28-Apr-1968.



- 1) Numbering as per HC-7 Rescue Log (accumulative rescue number)
- 2) HC-7 1967 Command Report
- 3) HC-7 Det 108 Rescue report
- 5) "Vietnam - Air Losses" By: Chris Hobson (with permission)
- 6) Unclassified accident report (B-3-46)
- 7) email from Tom Phillips – research for “Leave No Man Behind”
- 8) Aircraft position provided by W. Howard Plunkett (LtCol USAF, retired)
- 9) Map – Google Earth
- 10) HC-7 History collection; Ron Milam - Historian
- 11) Kaman Rotor Tips – March-April 1968

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