

HC-7 Rescue 1⁽¹⁾ 3-OCT-1967 Combat Day (Tuesday)
and

Attempted Rescue of: Maj. Robert W. Barnett 4-Oct-1967
Combat Day (Wednesday)

HC-7 DET 108 UH-2B Kaman Seasprite helo No. 150153
USS Coontz (DLG-9) Rescue 1; 1.5 miles from mainland within harbor,
Attempt; 8 miles **INLAND**

3-Oct-1967 **Pilot: LTJG Timothy S. Melecoski**
Co-pilot: LTJG James P. Brennan
1st crewman: AE2 Willie B. Pettit
2nd crewman (swimmer): ATN3 John H. Bevan

4-Oct-1967 **Pilot: LTJG Timothy S. Melecoski**
Co-pilot: LTJG James P. Brennan
1st crewman: AMH2 Gary L. Fleck
2nd crewman(swimmer): ADJ3 Gary L. Schwake.

A-4B Skyhawk No. 142114 "Nevada City 102" VSF-3 (Chessmen) USN,
USS INTREPID ⁽⁵⁾

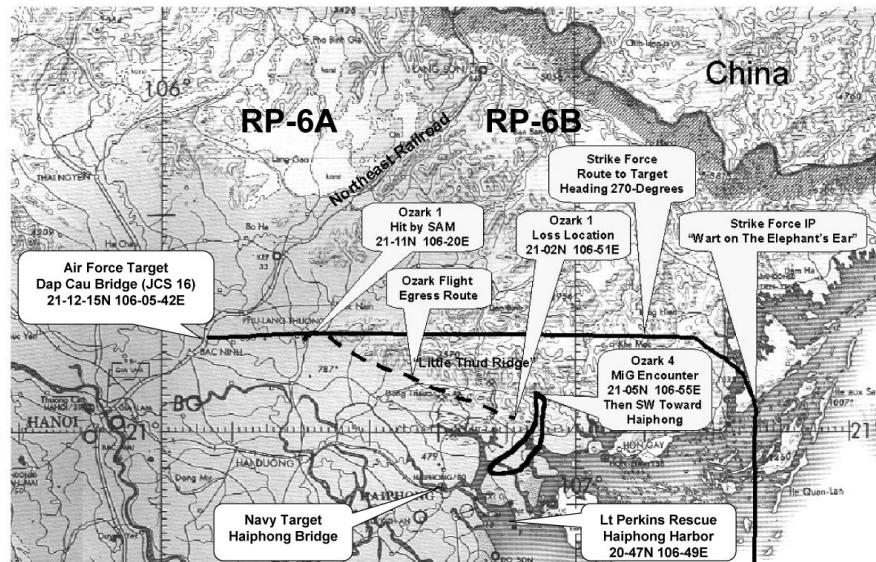
LTJG Allan D. Perkins

Navy - Helicopter Combat Support Squadron SEVEN, established Sept. 1, 1967 ², providing several fleet support activities, assumed the responsibility of North Vietnam naval combat search and rescue. HC-7 prepared for action utilizing UH-2B Kaman Sea Sprite helos ³ inherited from HC-1, stationed aboard small boys (DDs and DLGs) stationed off the coast of North Vietnam.

Tuesday - October 3, 1967, Air Force F-105 (Thunderchief, fighter/bomber, mach 2 capable) flights from Korat, Thailand were targeting bridges in North Vietnam. **Maj. Robert W. Barnett**, from 469th Tactical

Fighter Squadron (TFS) "Ozark One" was hit by a SAM. Approx. 15:15, trying to make feet wet, things freeze up and out he bailed. Chute and raft complications, Maj. Barnett makes it to the ground alive. 10 miles inland, rescap (rescue combat air patrol) forms to locate and identify their downed pilot. **HC-7**, Det 108, "Clementine 1", stationed aboard frigate USS Coontz (DLG-9), piloted by LTJG Timothy S. Melecoski, co-pilot LTJG James P. Brennan, first crewman AE2 Willie B. Pettit and second crewman (swimmer) ATN3 John H. Bevan, flying in a preposition orbit, had heard the radio calls and volunteered to go in⁴. With Barnett's exact location, undetermined "Clementine 1" was told to hold position⁹.

16:45, **LTJG Allan D. Perkins**, flying an A-4B, (attack / light fighter) from VSF-3 stationed aboard carrier USS INTREPID, call sign Nevada City 102, completing flak suppression, his aircraft hit three times headed toward feet wet. Aircraft failing and wounded in left leg, Perkins jettisoned over Haiphong Harbor⁵. Clementine had launched from USS Coontz (DLG 9) at 16:07. ⁽¹¹⁾ "Clementine 1" preparing to pick-up Maj. Barnett received call from "Steel Hawser" a Navy destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin, coordinating search and rescue operations, to divert to LTJG Perkins. Maj. Barnett was evading the enemy. Perkins landed in shallows amidst anchored ships becoming the higher priority⁴. USS Coontz, 16:50, sounds general quarters and begins closing on the beach to assist in the rescue mission.



Holding the helo on the deck, Melecoski weaves between the merchant ships within the shipping lane of Haiphong Harbor. Directed by over-head aircraft, the crew spots Perkins, 60 yards from an anchored ship. Unknown to the HC-7's swimmer, Perkins was squatting down in the shallows, to make a smaller target. 10-10 drop - swimmer away, and **stuck** in the mud⁴. Clementine receiving small arms and 87mm fire from hostile enemy forces in the area³. Helping each other Perkins and swimmer are free of the quagmire, signal, hooked-up and away, 17:00. "Rescue Effectuated" 17:15 Clementine is recovered aboard Coontz, with Perkins, who embarks to receive medical attention. ⁽¹¹⁾ At 18:20 Clementine is launched so Coontz receives SH-3 logistic helicopter at 18:24. One minute later Perkins, loaded on SH-3, is headed to USS INTREPID. Clementine returns at 18:27 as the Coontz reenters North SAR steaming area.

The Seadevil's first of many successful combat search and rescue missions. Low on fuel and day-light, Clementine prepares for the next day. "Steel Hawser" tells Maj. Barnett to hole-up and await rescue the next day ⁴. Barnett moved higher up hill and hid for a sleepless night.

Wednesday - October 4, 1967, 06:30, Maj. Barnett hears Navy planes and people. After hours of silence, continuing to evade, he hears two A-1s, which were escorting (11:34 Clem launches from USS Coontz) ⁽¹¹⁾ "Clementine 1" piloted by LTJG Timothy S. Melecoski, co-pilot LTJG James P. Brennan, first crewman AMH2 Gary Fleck and second crewman (swimmer) ADJ3 Gary Schwake. At 12:20, Melecoski told Barnett to fire pen flares and activate smokes, "Clementine 1" is over Maj. Barnett. All four approaches, preparing for retrieval, Clementine, receives heavy enemy fire ². Maj. Barnett hears Clementine pilot shout "**MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY**". The helo pulls away, Maj. Barnett runs downhill after the helo, trying to follow to the coast ⁴. The gunfire punctured the fuel tank. Helo crew throws all loose items out to lighten the load, manages feet wet before ditching ⁸. An SH-3 helo Big Mother 70 from HS-2 rescued the crew ⁶. At 13:37 the Navy pulled back the rescue forces, Barnett spends a second night in the jungle ⁴.

Thursday - October 5, 1967, while a second rescue attempt was being planned for 16:30, Barnett hurried toward the coast. Barnett's radio signal places him 5 miles from yesterday's position. Hearing people he hides in bushes, a dog finds him and the handler holding a pistol finds Barnett. In brief, the next two days his captors placed him at various anti-aircraft gun sites, required him to call the overhead planes. Barnett knew they were trying to set a Flak Trap. Told to turn his beeper on for five seconds, Barnett hands his radio to his keeper, who turned on the beeper for 2 minutes. Overhead aircraft now very cautious, Barnett figures another way to indicate his captivity. He said, "The code word is **LAM** -The code word is **LAM**" ⁴.

Saturday - October 7, 1967, Maj. Robert W. Barnett, arrived at the Hanoi Hilton at 04:00. Spending the next five and one-half years as a P.O.W. - released March 14, 1973 ⁽⁷⁾ "Freedom Flight".

Historian's Note: This was the only HC-7 helo lost to combat. No Seadevils were lost to combat. Six and one-half years later HC-7 would leave the Gulf of Tonkin, having provided combat search and rescue continuously until Sept. 24, 1973. HC-7 compiled a record of 150 rescues, 102 of which were potential POWs, additionally many unsuccessful attempts ¹⁰.

(Following notes added from USS Coontz deck logs ⁽¹¹⁾); 4-Oct-1967

"11:34 UH-2B helo clear of ship. 11:36 secured helo detail.

1200-1600: underway as before, 12:01 set the helo detail. 12:05 recovered SH-3A helo No. 70 on deck. CDR Klinker, USN, came aboard to observe SAR efforts. 12:09 refueled SH-3A helo. 12:13 launched SH-3A helo No. 70. 12:29 recovered SH-3A helo No. 69 on deck, refueled SH-3A helo. 12:33 launched SH-3A helo No. 69. 12:35 secured the helo detail. 12:41 maneuvering various courses at 8 knots to remain in vicinity of assigned NSAR station. 12:57 UH-2B helo from this ship received numerous hits from enemy ground fire while attempting to make helo recovery of downed pilot over North Vietnam in

the vicinity of Lat. 21-01.2 N, Long 106-55.5E. 12:58 UH-2B helo heading for the coast at best speed. 13:02 sounded General Quarters. Commenced closing the coast on course 330, speed 25 knots to assist in recovering helo. Stationed the helo detail. 13:08 material condition Zebra set. Stationed armed boat detail. 13:12 c/c to 348. 13:13 UH-2B Helo Buno 150153, pilot Melecosky, co-pilot Brennan, and two crewman Fleck and Schwake, crashed into the water in the vicinity of Lat. 20°-47 N, Long 107°-11 E, helo sunk in 6 fathoms of water. 13:14 SH-3A helo No. 70 en-route to vicinity of crash to search for survivors under control of this ship. 13:16 c/c to 045. 13:17 c/c to 270. 13:21 all four members of crew of downed UH-2B helo picked-up by SH-3A No. 70 and en-route to this ship. 13:32 recovered SH-3A helo 70 on deck. Four helo survivors in good condition, Melecosky suffered slight lacerations on his right hand, a bruised back, and injured ears. Fleck suffered a bruised left shoulder. The other two survivors appeared uninjured. All four were returned to duty following a thorough medical check by the staff doctor.....14:40 SH-3A helo No. 70 clear of the deck. 14:53 recovered UH-2B helo on deck.”

The two crewmembers were Gary Fleck AMH-2, hoist-man, and Gary Schwake ADJ-3 (I think) swimmer. On that day, we were sitting on the flight deck, sort of wasting time, waiting for the return of the Helo, when all of a sudden, the ship started to accelerate... this was a DLG, and we had a rooster tail!! We found that the captain had been notified that our helo was in trouble, and he pointed that ship up the Hai Phong channel and headed in!! At about that time, the missiles slammed out on the racks, and we saw that they were not dummies. They were real. We immediately went indoors!!! At some point, (it's been 47 years, after all) a helo landed aboard, and Melecoski, Brennan, Fleck, and Schwake, stepped out, and they seemed very happy..... I'm not sure what you wanted; this is the best of what I can remember. I always thought that someone had been rescued, but maybe not. The story I always remembered was that the helo was hit by mortar fire in the fuel tanks, rose to about 6000 ft, and stair stepped down from there and went over the beach at less than 500 feet, no engine, and hit the water at about 800 yards off the beach. There was a junk headed toward the crash site, but a helo won the race. Whatever else you need, let me know.... John Bevan (via email 5-11-2014)

Notes taken at 2018 HC-7 Reunion, San Antonio, TX. May 17, 2018 by: Ron Milam

John Bevan – Gary Schwake – Bill Luse – Gary Fleck - “THE BUDDA BASTARDS”

1. Helo had “Co-pilot ejection seat button” “PRESS to Eject Co-pilot”

A large ALPHA strike was to take place. For downed pilot Barrett, there was NO location. He was downed in “Happy Valley”.

Oct 3rd – en-route to Barrett were diverted to PERKINS. John and Willie were aboard helo. Willie tapped John and he jumped. 40-50 yards off of beach. Stuck in the mud, rescuee helped

John to free self. Helo returns – Willie throughs the cable and hook to John, hooks to “D” ring. Under fire, helo pulls them out of mud. Among ships, each side. People on beach were firing.

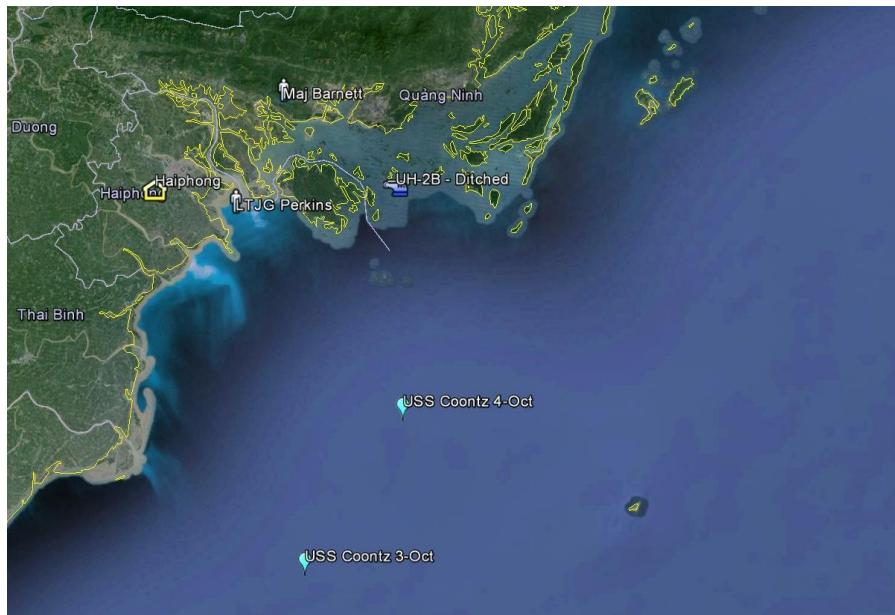
Oct 4th – To rescue Barrett, NOT to go in at night. Early morning “GO” in HIGH. Antiaircraft – 87mm. Drop down lower to view through jungle, encountered shooting, M60 jams. Barrett had lit flares, but the jungle canopy defused the smoke, no definite location.

Gary and Gary – trying to find Barrett, see the leaves of the trees becoming SHINY, **FUEL LEAK**. They observed orange suits, decoy VC in the area. Two more attempts. Helo was CAMO painted (olive drab) inside and out, but the window was the only NON-CAMO area, VC had a great shiny target.

Low on fuel, shot in fuel sump area, head to 10,000 feet elevation. Close the doors to lessen wind resistance. Observe the tail pylon having a LARGE hole (6”), let the light shin in. Looking down on Haiphong harbor, the “candle went out” – NO engine, fuel starvation. Auto-rotate to the water. Vietnamese junks headed to area.

HS-2 - SH-3 helo from USS Coontz heads to area, as does USS Tucker. As the helo hits the water, Melcosky applies the rotor brake, the helo rolls left. Fleck goes out the door, hurt head, neck, shoulder, back. Co-pilot Brennen was also hurt. During pick-ups the hoist cable of the SH-3 BROKE, (after two pick-ups) helo lands in water. Rotor wash blows the remaining crew away from helo. Melcosky couldn’t swim well, Fleck helped pull him to helo.

Spads stayed around until they ran out of ammo. One had his canopy shot off, saw pilot wearing a silk scarf. Fleck taken to USS Constellation for medical treatment. Two weeks later continued flying. Later found shrapnel in head. Part of the crew was flown to DANANG for debriefing. The rotor blades looked like pealed back tinfoil. Big hole in tail pylon.



Notes: (not in order)

- 1) Numbering as per HC-7 Rescue Log
- 2) HC-7 1967 Command Report
- 3) HC-7 Det 108 Rescue report October 3, 1967
- 4) *Air Power - History* Spring 2006 "Ozark Lead is out of the Aircraft" (map) by: W. Howard Plunkett
- 5) "Vietnam - Air Losses" By: Chris Hobson (with permission)
- 6) Unedited portions of "Leave No Man Behind" by: George Galdorisi & Tom Phillips (with permission)
- 7) "Honor Bound" by: Stuart I. Rochester and Frederick Kiley
- 8) email - Oct. 01, 2005 - Commander Lloyd Parthermer - Skipper number ONE HC-7
- 9) Ozark Transcript - location map - by: W. Howard Plunkett - email 9-21-2011
- 10) HC-7 History collection - Ron Milam – Historian
- 11) USS Coontz (DLG-9) deck log
- 12) Map – Google Earth

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