

HC-7 Attempt RESCUE 17-Sept-1972 (Sunday)

SH-3A Sikorsky Seaking helo Det 110 Big Mothers
USS England (DLG-22) Control ship Combat Day
3 miles NW of Grand Norway Lighthouse
Air Temp - 84° Water Temp - 83° Wind 90°/11 knots Sea State – 2 4'-6' waves

Primary Helo Crew - Big Mother 70 - Preposition 10 miles SW (USS Biddle)

Pilot – LT	David A. Swan
Co-pilot - LT	Gene E. Gilbert
1st crew – ADJ-2	Timothy W. McCarthy
2nd crew – ADJ-2	Robert J. Ford

USS Biddle (DLG-34) Deck Log
10:26 launch helo SH3-70
11:59 recover helo SH3-70

Back-up Helo Crew - Big Mother 61 - Preposition 13 miles SW (USS England)

Pilot – LT	Franklin D. Lockett
Co-pilot - LTJG	Jerry M. Haggerty
1st crew – ADJ-3	Michael R. Harlow
2nd crew – ADJ-2	Miguel W. Melendez

Rescue Report;

Alert Received – 10:55 – Radio / ATK Freq
Departed - 10:56
On Scene - 11:07
Located Survivors - 11:07 – Descending in Chutes
Began Retrieval - 11:08 – 10 and 10 Drop swimmer
Complete Retrieval – 11:30 – Helo Hoist

Total SAR Time All Units - 3 hours 40 minutes.

USS England (DLG-22) Deck Log

10:09 Flight Quarters to launch Big Mother 61
10:21 Big Mother away to port
11:33 Set flight quarters to recover Big Mother 61
11:52 Helo on deck

F-105G Thunderchief 63-8360 17 Wild Weasel Sqdn, 388 TFW, 7th USAF,
Korat

Capt Thomas Oneal Zorn (KIA)
Born: 6-14-1946 Wall – Panel 01W – Row 074
1 Lt Michael Stephen Turose EWO (KIA)
Born: 8-12-1948 Wall – Panel 01W – Row 074

A Wild Weasel on an armed reconnaissance mission received indications that it was being tracked by a Fon Song radar about 20 miles north of Haiphong. The aircraft was badly damaged by the explosion of a SAM at 11,000 feet causing major damage to the rear fuselage. Capt Zorn headed towards the southeast and crossed the coast. However, the aircraft crashed into the sea about 25 miles southeast of Haiphong and both the crew were killed. ⁽⁵⁾

SECTION E. ITEM 37. ⁽²⁾

On 17 September 1972, between the hours of 1030H to 1130H an Air Force F-4 was hit by enemy fire over Haiphong. The crew ejected into Haiphong Harbor. The following is a descriptive narrative of the ensuing rescue attempt:

Upon hearing a MAYDAY report, two SAR helos departed preposition points receiving vectors from the controlling ship. The primary helo spotted the splashdown of the distressed aircraft and proceeded to it. The on-scene commander marked the position of the helo at the impact point and provided vectors from that reference to the point where two chutes would be descending through a broken cloud layer. The primary helo, sighting the descending parachutes, (on our nose at 3 miles) maneuvered and dropped swimmer at the water entry point of the first rescuee using a ten and ten drop method. The back-up helo, spotting the second chute in the water, maneuvered and dropped its swimmer. Difficulty was encountered in placing the swimmer near the second rescuee due to the parachute being only partially collapsed and dragging the rescuee away from the helo. When the helos arrived at their respective rescuees both crews noted that the rescuees were submerged face down, still attached to their parachutes, and that their flotation gear was not inflated. Only the second rescuee had an inflated life raft. Both rescuees appeared to be lifeless. At this time both helos encountered heavy and accurate hostile fire from coastal position approximately five to seven miles north. The primary helo completed one race track pattern and returned to pick up his swimmer. The swimmer had reached the rescuee, 15-20 feet under water but was unable to inflate the victim's flotation gear due to shroud line entanglement. As the primary helo retrieved his swimmer, the back-up helo called for assistance to pick up the second victim. The back-up helo experienced ICS failure between the cabin and cockpit resulting in

considerable difficulty in picking up their swimmer. The primary helo then proceeded to the 2nd victim and dropped his swimmer into the water. Again, the partially inflated chute on the surface dragged the 2nd victim away from the swimmer. The 10 and 10 method was used for this drop also but the primary helo remained at the sight due to the lifeless condition of the 2nd victim in turn changed the number 1 priority to picking up his swimmer and exiting the area, which was still under intense fire. As the primary helo hoisted his swimmer out of the water the hoist jammed, leaving the swimmer dangling approximately three feet below the aircraft. The swimmer had entered the horse-collar improperly thinking that the primary helo was just going to move him over closure to the 2nd victim. The swimmer began slipping from the horse-collar and had to be lowered back into the water. The back-up helo was still in a hover retrieving their swimmer and called for the primary to move out of the area and drop a diversionary smoke lite. The primary helo proceeded 3-4 hundred yards out of the area, leaving their swimmer behind and dropped the diversionary smoke, meanwhile asking the back-up helo to pickup the swimmer. The backup helo had by then succeeded in rescuing its own swimmer but was unable to locate the other swimmer and dropped a smoke lite upwind from the area in which he believed him to be. The backup helo then entered a race track pattern into and out of the heavy fire searching for the primary helo's swimmer. The primary helo returned and entered a similar search pattern. The backup helo made three to four penetrations into the hostile fire which was increasingly heavy and accurate, without sighting the swimmer. The primary helo was entering its third penetration when the crewman spotted the flare (night end) of a day/night hand held signal flare which the swimmer had ignited. The pilots not seeing the flare depended on the crewman's directions to the swimmer which were concise and accurate.

The failed hoist with only a few feet dangling below the aircraft necessitated an extremely low hover to affect the pickup. The swimmer entered the horse-collar and the two helos proceeded out of the area with the swimmer suspended approximately three feet below the primary helo. The swimmer again began slipping from the sling so the aircraft entered another hover lowering him back into the water. The swimmer gained a better position in the horse-collar and both helos then proceeded further out of range of the shore batteries with the backup helo entering the trail position. When clear of the area the primary helo lowered his swimmer back into the water and the backup helo hoisted him safely aboard.

The two SAR helos proceeded to their respective SAR pickett ships. Heavy and accurate hostile fire was received, where both smoke lights had been placed throughout the rescue attempt. Rescap provided suppressive fire but after each Rescap run, the hostile fire opened up again. The primary helo received limited battle damage. The swimmer of the backup helo suffered from anxiety reaction.

ATTEMPTED RESCUE SEPTEMBER 17, 1972

LT D. A. SWAN: Personal account concerning the rescue attempt of an Air Force F-4 crew after their aircraft was hit by enemy fire over Haiphong, North Vietnam; I was the pilot-in-command of the primary rescue helicopter. We were being vectored from our SAR station to a preposition point when I heard a MAYDAY call. We sighted the point of impact of the aircraft and proceeded to it. The wing man of the downed aircraft had us visually at the crash site and used the site as a reference to vector us to the vicinity where the two pilots were making a parachute descent. We saw them in their chutes coming down overhead and were at the scene where the first rescuee landed within 45 seconds of his water contact. Using the 10 and 10 method we dropped our swimmer into the water for the rescue then came around in a racetrack pattern to pick both of them up. The rescuee was submerged face down in a spread eagle position. He had made no attempt to release his parachute or to inflate his flotation equipment. We recovered our swimmer.

While we were at the first rescuee, a second helicopter had arrived at the second rescuee and dropped its swimmer for the recovery. I asked the second helo if he had him. He said no that his swimmer was out of position for the pickup and that they were trying to pick him up. We then proceeded to the second rescuee and dropped our swimmer again using the 10 and 10 method. At this time, we began taking intense enemy fire, which was confirmed by the on-scene-commander (wingman) overhead. As we dropped our swimmer, I noted the second rescuee also submerged under water face down with a pool of blood around his head. His parachute was also still attached, the floatation gear was not inflated, but his raft was inflated. The parachute was only partially collapsed and being blown by the rotor-wash dragging the rescuee away from our swimmer. After our swimmer drop, we remained at the scene because the rescuee appeared to be dead (as did the first rescuee) and hostile fire was increasing heavy and accurate. My concern then was recover my swimmer and get out of the area. We picked up our swimmer but as he neared the bottom of the helo the hoist failed (stopped). We began to depart the area with our swimmer hanging below the helo. The first crewman reported that he was slipping from the horse-collar, so I elected to come to a low hover and put him back in the water. The backup helo was at out 9 o'clock position retrieving his swimmer, when a large shell burst impacted between the two helos. The concussion of the blast knocked us violently to the right. Our swimmer was now back in the water and we left the area. The backup helo asked us to drop a diversionary smoke. We proceeded to a point 3-4 hundred yards away and dropped the smoke hoping to draw fire away from the rescue scene where the other helo was unsuccessfully trying to locate our swimmer. We returned to the area to try our luck. By now, we had given up all hope of recovering the bodies of the two pilots and both helos concentrated their efforts on locating and picking up our swimmer. Our hoist was hopelessly in-op with about three feet hanging below the aircraft. When we arrived back at the scene, there was a smoke in the water with intense fire all around (the smoke had been dropped by the other helo). We flew into the area two times without sighting our swimmer. Heavy fire and shell bursts continued and it was just pure luck that neither of the helos received a direct hit. We circled into the fire for a third time when our crewman sighted the flare of a day/night hand held signal flare which our swimmer had ignited. The crewman guided us over to our swimmer. I was seriously considering a water landing to insure his rescue. We had entered an extremely low hover (about 2 foot) when our swimmer grabbed the horse-collar. We left the area with him again hanging below the helo. He began to slip out of the sling so we lowered him back into the water so that he could enter it properly. We continued out of the area, which was still under intense accurate fire. The shore batteries had also begun shelling the dummy smoke. The other helicopter entered the trail position. Our first crewman said we had to get our swimmer off the hoist. When relatively clear of the shell explosions we lowered the swimmer back into the water and the other helo hoisted him safely aboard. We returned to the USS BRIDDLE and the other helo landed aboard the USS ENGLAND

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

1. Both rescuees apparently dead with parachutes attached and flotation gear uninflated.
2. Partially inflated parachute of second rescuee.
3. Heavy and accurate hostile fire.
4. Failed rescue hoist on primary helo.
5. Choppy sea state obstructing swimmer from the view of the helicopter crews.

STATEMENT OF CO-PILOT - LT. GENE E. GILBERT, USN

We were flying a SAR rescue helicopter being vectored to a preposition point by the controlling ship, USS ENGLAND when we heard a "Mayday" call. The position given was over Haiphong Harbor so we headed North toward that area. Shortly afterwards we saw an aircraft crash into the water directly

in front of us and we flew toward the oil slick. At this time the wingman of the downed aircraft saw us below him and by using the oil slick as a reference point he vectored us to the southwest where the pilots of the downed aircraft were descending by parachute. We received several vectors and soon spotted two good chutes descending through a broken overcast.

We proceeded to the parachute that struck the water first and arrived over the first chute in a hover about thirty seconds after it entered the water. We dropped a swimmer into the water near the pilot. At this time the downed pilot appeared to be floating face down about three feet below the surface of the water. The aircrewman dove under the water to cut the pilot free of his parachute but was unable to do so. He returned to the surface and indicated that the man was dead. We hoisted our crewman back aboard the helicopter and proceeded to the second man.

Another rescue helo was at the scene at this time and had dropped an aircrewman into the water at what he thought was the second man's position, however, he was about 100 yards past the second and told us to try for the pickup. We moved over the second man and as we passed, and once again dropped our swimmer, I noted blood in the water around the second pilot. The second man was face down in the water and was being dragged by his parachute which had not collapsed. Neither pilot had inflated his life vest and they had shown no sign of life during the descent or after striking the water. Our crewman indicated that the second man was dead so we began to hoist our swimmer clear of the water. At this point RESCAP began reporting incoming fire from the several islands in the area and we could see large splashes and explosions in the area around us.

As we began to hoist our swimmer our hoist cable jammed and we could not bring him up to the helo. We intended at first to let our crewman hang in the hoist collar while we departed the area due to the incoming fire that was growing progressively more intense. Our other crewman reported that our swimmer was not securely in the hoist sling and had begun to slip from the rescue collar so we had to reduce our speed and lower the swimmer back into the water. Shore fire was becoming extremely heavy and I could see shrapnel hitting the water all around us and could smell the smoke from the shell bursts.

We called the other helicopter and told him the situation. The other crewman was just completing hoisting her crewman into the helo and was preparing to move over and pick up our swimmer when several rounds from the shore battery exploded in our immediate vicinity. The concussion threw our helo sideways and we tilted to the right. The water splashes obscured our view of our crewman. I could hear bits of shrapnel hitting the helo; it sounded like hail on a tin roof.

We regained control and determined that the helo was not seriously damaged. The other helo was circling to pick up our crewman and we proceeded to about 300 yards away from the scene and dropped a signal smoke in an attempt to draw fire away from the other helo while he picked up our crewman. The other helo was searching the area for him.

We proceeded back into the area and began to search for our crewman. RESCAP was attacking the gun emplacements on shore but was unable to stop the firing other than momentarily. As soon as RESCAP pulled off target the guns would open up on us again. By that time the guns had our position zeroed in and it seemed only a matter of time until one of the helos would be hit.

We were in the area for about 1/2 hour. On our third pass through the area our swimmer fired a signal flare and we spotted him. The other helo was about 1/2 mile away and we couldn't wait for him to reach us due to the enemy fire. We slowed to a hover over our crewman and he grabbed the hoist. We then started out of the area but once again our crewman began to slip from the rescue collar. We had to stop and lower him back into the water. We were still in the area of heavy fire and thought the

risk was too great to call in the other helo at that time. Our crewman managed to get securely into the hoist collar, we proceeded about 1 mile out of the area and lowered him back into the water. We hovered near him while the other helo came over and hoisted him into the helo.

We proceeded out of the area in company with the other rescue helo. We returned to the USS BIDDLE and made a precautionary landing to check our helo for damage. Damage was slight so we then proceeded to the USS AMERICA for repairs on our hoist.

STATEMENT OF: TIMOTHY MCCARTHY, ADJ2

We were on a pre-position when we heard a Mayday, then they reported two good chutes. We got vectors to the spot they should come down. On our way we passed over the wreckage. As we got to the location, we spotted two chutes in the air. They were blowing seaward. One hit the water and we were on final. We came into a 10 and 10 and as I tapped FORD out I reported a man to be under water, tangled in his lines and unconscious. We started into a race track and I suggested we over fly the other pilot and check his condition so as to tell the second helo what to expect. We were half way through a race track when the chute FORD was working on disappeared, I said lets go get FORD, knowing he didn't have enough time to get the men out of his chute. FORD was not in sight. Then suddenly he appeared on the surface. We picked him up and he tried to explain why he couldn't get the guy, obviously upset. At this time, the other helo reported to have over shot their man also blowing him away and were picking up their swimmer. (At this time, I noticed we were under seriously heavy fire). We made an approach and dropped FORD. Our rotor wash blew the man about 50 yards away. We were 10 feet off the water and the man looks dead to me, at this time, he'd been under water a couple minutes plus his face was covered with blood. Now the chute was blowing by natural winds, faster than anyone could swim. I reported he looked dead lets get FORD. If we'd gotten FORD with no trouble we could of made another approach to the pilot but it seems like it took 15 to 20 minutes to pick up FORD. We came in for a pickup and FORD grabbed the hook. He'd left his snap link on the hook after the first pickup so this time he was just holding on. I got the hoist to the bottom of the door and then it jammed. I grabbed his arm to try to pull him in so I told the pilots what was up. FORD shook his head and I told the pilots we had to put him back in. We got low and in he went. We moved left and waited for the second helo to pick up their swimmer. I think this is when we got hit so we broke off and did a race track. We came back in and tried to talk the other helo into a position over our man. He couldn't do it and because of fire we both broke off. When we came back, we could not find FORD, neither bird could. We both kept circling the area for what seem like 15 minutes. During this time the fire was intense, we took a hit so close on the right that the concussion knocked me off my feet. Finally, I saw a kind of red flash on our nose. I thought it was FORD with a night smoke. We went in on it and it was him, we hovered at two feet and FORD grabbed the sling. We started to depart the area. By this time, the second chute had disappeared. I thought we were kind of clear so I talked us down and Bob got in the sling the right way. Now we took off again and got pretty clear then put him back in the water and the second help picked him up. They went to the USS ENGLAND and we went to the USS BIDDLE and shut down for fuel and to check for battle damage. We had taken a couple small hits from shrapnel.

I suggest because of the high probability that this could happen again all swimmers take radios in the water. We'd never have lost FORD if he were talking to us.

Attempted Rescue Report of 17 Sept. 1972

By: ADJ2 (AC) Robert J. Ford USN

We just arrived on station for a strike pre-position. A plane came up Mayday heading feet wet

so I immediately went off I. C. S. and got into my swim gear. After getting ready I came back on I.C.S. and took watch out the port side of the aircraft. RESCAP was on the scene and started giving us vectors to the pilots descending in their chutes.

The downed pilots broke through the clouds on our nose approximately three miles. I again went off I.C.S. and awaited the signal to enter the water. The first crewman, Tim McCARTHY, gave me three taps on the shoulder and I entered the water. After Clearing my mask, I gave the thumbs up and looked for the pilot. I saw part of his chute floating so I started to swim towards it. Looking under water while I swam I saw the pilot was about 25 feet away approximately 15 to 20 ft under water. He was in an upside down half sitting position. His helmet was off, the left side of his face was cut, his flotation gear was not inflated, his seat pan was still attached not deploying his raft and it appeared there was no attempt made to get out of his harness. Also he was entangled in his shroud lines which were all spread out working in the water like a jelly-fish.

I dove down making an attempt to inflate his flotation gear but two shrouds started to wrap around my ankle; after getting clear, I was running short on air so I started tugging on his shroud lines trying to pull him up. Not being successful, I surfaced for air. I tried pulling him up by the little bit of chute still floating. All that did was pull me under water because he was steadily sinking. The ocean swells being 6-8 feet high and churning, made it impossible to cut all the shroud lines. By this time, the chute was completely submerged and sinking. Since further efforts would be useless, I signaled the helo to pick me up. I knew that a second helo was in the area and was aiding the other pilot. I was hoisted into the aircraft and was told that I was going in after the other pilot. I didn't know the situation of the second pilot. On approach I noticed his chute being blown thru the water but did not see him. I entered the water and after giving thumbs up started swimming toward the pilot. After not making headway because of the wind blowing the chute faster than I could swim I signaled for the helo to pick me up.

McCARTHY lowered the horse collar and thinking I was just going to be air taxied to the chute I did not enter the collar properly. I held on by both hands to make it faster. McCARTHY hoisted me to the cargo door and tried to pull me into the aircraft. I was dropped back into the water and the helo moved off to my right and hovered.

It wasn't until then that I realized we were taking heavy fire. I gave the splashing signal so the helo would know that I was ready to be picked back up. It was then that they flew off leaving me there in the water. The first round that I noticed hit between me and the helo. After that every time that either helo started toward me rounds would go off all around me and the aircraft. I didn't realize that they had lost site of me. I saw the diversion smoke that was dropped to distract the fire. At times the shells were hitting within 10 to 20 yards from me throwing shrapnel to within five feet. I continued swimming away from land splashing the water every time that either helo got within range of me. I could see the smoke rising from the shore line and I could hear them firing. After hearing them fire I would listen to the round whistle overhead and then explode into the water. I thought for sure that one of the helos was gone when the rounds were walking up her tail but she turned out of it. After twenty minutes of one

round after another I finally decided to light off a night smoke to get attention. The helo I was in saw it and was in on me. Her tail wheel was in the water. The only thing between the hull of the aircraft and the water was my head. I got into the horse collar. Being scared, I got into it backwards. I hung on with all my strength as the helo flew me to safety. McCARTHY told me through hand signals that the hoist was jammed and the second helo would pick me up. The first helo then dropped me in the water and I waited about 15 seconds for the second to hoist me out of the water. I was pulled into the aircraft by first crewman Mike HARLOW and flown back to the USS England.

**ATTEMPTED RESCUE OF TWO AIR FORCE PILOTS IN THE VICINITY OF
HAIPHONG HARBOR
STATEMENT OF BACK-UP HELO, LT FRANKLIN D. LOCKETT, USNR,**

On the morning of 17 September 1972, the back-up helo launched off the USS ENGLAND at approximately 1030 to cover an Air Force strike. We had arrived at our preposition point when we were ordered to hold three miles farther south to allow separation from the primary helo, which was on its way to cover the same strike. At approximately 1055 we got a "Mayday" call from an Air Force plane that had been hit by hostile fire and was heading seaward. Both helos headed in the direction for rendezvous with the distressed plane. I remember hearing the distress plane wingman call fifteen miles feet wet and ejection. We traveled in the general direction of the scene under control of the launching ship. The chutes were spotted in the water about 5 miles ahead. I saw the primary helo making an approach on one of the chutes. I turned to second chute and shortly thereafter made an approach on it arriving in a hover over the downed pilot. The chute was still partially inflated. I lowered the altitude to 10 foot and dropped the swimmer. At this time, I heard the on-scene-commander call "helos taking fire." I broke hover and stated a starboard turn and sure enough I saw a couple of rounds hit less than 50 yards away. I continued my approach and realized my swimmer was in trouble and the chute was being steadily blown away with the survivor attached. I decided to retrieve my swimmer to place him in a more advantageous position. We lost ICS and were having some difficulty retrieving the swimmer. I heard the primary helo report his swimmer was back aboard, so, I called to the primary helo and told him of my difficulties and asked him to try and make the pickup of the second survivor. I was in a hover for approximately 1 ½ minutes which seemed like an eternity with fire going all around. Through broken and intermittent ICS we get our swimmer aboard.

I heard the primary helo say his joist had jammed and was unable to pickup his swimmer. I told the primary helo that my ICS was down but would pickup his swimmer if he could direct me over him. I lost sight of his swimmer and proceeded upwind and dropped a smoke to try to divert some of the fire we were taking. I went back into the area where I thought the primary helo's swimmer was but unable to spot him. I told the primary I was unable to spot his swimmer. We both set up a race track pattern in and out of the heavy fire area trying to spot the swimmer. After approximately four passes, each the primary helo spotted his swimmer and pulled into a very low hover; he had about three feet of hoist cable hanging below the helo. The swimmer grabbed the hoist then the helo headed southeast for about a mile and lowered swimmer back into the water twice. When they lowered him the second time, I pulled into an immediate hover and picked up their swimmer. We both headed out of the area.

PROBLEMS

1. Both pilots believed to be dead on impact with the water.
2. Heavy armed fire from the beach with good accuracy.
3. Lost ICS in my helo.
4. Jammed joist in primary helo.
5. Inflated parachute with about 12-15 knots of wind.

STATEMENT OF ATTEMPTED RESCUE BY CO-PILO LTJG J. M. HAGGERTY

At 1020 on 17 September 1972 our halo was launched to preposition for an Air Force strike. The USS ENGLAND was controlling us. Another helo was pre-positioning about three miles east of our position. At 1055, we received a Mayday over the radios. We were vectored to where the chutes would be hitting the water, approximately 13 miles northeast. At about 1108, I spotted the chutes at my 9 o'clock. We turned toward the spot. The other helo was moving in on one pilot at this time, so we headed for the second about 100 - 200 yards from the first. We pulled over the pilot to drop our swimmer. He was still attached to the parachute making no effort to release himself. Our crewman tried to back us over the body but was unable due to our rotor wash blowing the parachute which had not collapsed. Two things happened at this time. The on-scene commander said we were taking fire from shore. Second, our crewman's ICS went intermittent then unreadable.

We dropped our swimmer, departed the hover, and made a race track pattern to come around for the pickup. However, our swimmer was 50 yards from the downed pilot so we elected to pick up our swimmer to replace him. Then the other helo called us and said they had their swimmer aboard and the pilot they went after was dead. We told them we were going after our swimmer and asked them to try for the second pilot. Meanwhile, heavy fire was coming in and getting more accurate. We pulled into a hover over our swimmer to pick him up. However, with the crewman's ICS very broken we were having difficulty picking up the swimmer. Then the other helo told us they had dropped their swimmer, were trying to pick him up and their hoist failed (stopped) with about 12 feet left out. They asked us to pickup their swimmer after ours. They were going to stay over their swimmer to mark him for us but due to heavy fire had to leave the area briefly. After we retrieved our swimmer, we circled to pick up the other swimmer but could not locate him. We made several passes as did the other helo. Finally, the other helo spotted him, went into a low hover so the swimmer could grab the horse collar. They then airlifted him to a safe area, dropped him back into the water and we picked him up. Then both helos departed the area since both pilots were dead and the enemy fire precluded an attempt to retrieve the body of the second pilot. We then returned to USS ENGLAND where our swimmer was treated for anxiety reaction. The SAR effort was terminated.

STATEMENT OF ATTEMPTED RESCUE ON 17 SEPTEMBER 1972

BY: ADJ3 (FIRST CREWMAN) MICHAEL R. HARLOW USN

We launched off the USS ENGLAND to preposition in support of an Air Force strike. We were anchored in position about 10 minutes when we heard a Mayday on our radios. After a lot of confusion on the guard frequency we were given vectors to the area where the chutes would come down. Upon arriving at the scene, I (Michael R. Harlow ADJ3) had my second crewman (Miguel Melendez ADJ2) ready and sitting in the door. We were approaching a chute very fast and started to flare. We overshot it by maybe 50 feet, at which time I instructed the pilot (Lt Locket) to back up. The parachute was inflated from the wind and dragging the survivor backwards about 3-4 feet underwater. He was not struggling in the chute. He was just being dragged around. I figured he was dead but we were so close to splashdown, that I and probably everyone else figured artificial respiration could save him. Upon backing the helo up I noticed our rotor wash blew the chute even further out of reach. Rather than take the time to go around and make a downwind pass, I elected to insert my swimmer and let him swim to the man. Time was critical. Only about 50 yards separated my swimmer from the man. As soon as MELENDEZ entered the water, my ICS started breaking up, then cut out completely. At the same time, shore batteries opened up on us with surprising accuracy.

Rounds were pouring in and kicking up mud. For the life of me I couldn't get the ICS to work -- all three aft stations were weak and breaking up. I could only hear but couldn't talk to the pilot. Mr.

Locket decided the area was too hot and that we'd pick up MELENDEZ and get out. We temporarily lost sight of him in the high sea-state and reflections but eventually sighted him. I tried to talk us over him but I doubt the pilot heard me very much. I eventually managed to swing the hook into his grasp. He hooked on and I brought him up and inside. He appeared to be in shock; totally exhausted and limp as a rag. Suspecting injuries, I quickly looked him over, talked to him and moved him out of the way. He gave me a thumbs-up then vomited about a gallon of salt water. He wasn't in the best of shape but it was sure nice having him back. I suspect a round went off very close to him. The other helo then told us they couldn't find their swimmer. We made a slow pass over the area and took tremendous fire. We pulled out and gained altitude. Then I was looking down at the other bird. They had located their swimmer and were about 5 feet off the water picking him up when several rounds dropped into their area, one of which missed by approximately 15 feet. They got the man on the cable and started pulling out while the rounds kept pouring in. They informed us that their hoist was now jammed and couldn't get their swimmer in. So our bird followed them for about 4-5 miles away from the barrage. By this time I got my ICS to the point where I could talk but not hear: enough to pick up the other swimmer. They finally slowed and pulled into a hover. Their swimmer (Bob FORD ADJ2) had just been on a long windy ride on a string. He unhooked and I talked Mr. Locket over him, put the hook in his hand and snatched him out of the water. We then decided it was too late to go back for the pilots and certainly too hot. We called it off and returned to the USS ENGLAND for medical help and to check for battle damage. The flight surgeon said MELENDEZ had swallowed a lot of water and was probably scared half to death. I guess we all were.

STATEMENT OF MIGUEL W. MELENDEZ, ADJ2, USN

On 17 September 1972, our helo was on a preposition for an Air Force strike. We heard a Mayday. I imagined that a Phantom was hit. We were vectored to the two downed pilots; we reached the area in about what seemed 10 minutes. Another helo was over the first survivor. We took the other who was still in his chute and had made no attempt to dislodge himself from it. I also noticed his floatation gear was not inflated. My man was under water and it looked like he was dead. The pilot (LT LOCKETT) dropped off about 50 yards from the chute because the chute would drift away if we came close. I dropped into the water and saw the chute. The swells were pretty high and sometimes hid it from my sight. I started swimming toward the chute. It seemed to be impossible, because the chute kept drifting away from me. We were taking shore battery fire pretty heavy and they were getting close to my position. The helo came in to get me several times and finally I was in the aircraft. I would think that someone would initiate something so that when the chute opened the flotation gear would inflate.



- 1) Numbering as per HC-7 Rescue Log (accumulative rescue number)
- 2) HC-7 Det 110 Rescue Report
- 4) Map – Google Earth
- 5) "Vietnam - Air Losses" By: Chris Hobson (with permission)
- 9) Loss aircraft location data provided by: W. Howard Plunkett (LtCol USAF, retired)
- 10) HC-7 History collection; Ron Milam - Historian

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

USAF LOG (Zulu) Local + 8 hours) (hard to read)

17 SEP 1972

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|-------------------|--|
| 17/0253 CONDOR 01 | Frm JX – punched out ATT 18-30 – 107-58 – Iron Hand – type F-105 ??? |
| 17/0345 CONDOR 01 | frm NAVY – both deceased – determined by swimmer in water. |