

HC-7 Attempt RESCUE 29-Oct-1972 (Sunday)

SH-3A Sikorsky Seaking helo Det 110 Big Mothers
Combat Day
1500 feet off North Vietnam coast
Air Temp - 78° Water Temp - 75° Wind 330°/5 knots Sea State – Calm

Primary Helo Crew - Big Mother 65 - Ready Alert (USS Reeves (DLG-25))

Pilot – LT	Karl R. Rolls
Co-pilot - LTJG	Early H. Frazier
1st crew – ADJ-2	Robert J. Ford
2nd crew – ADJ-3	Donald L. Erickson

Back-up Helo Crew - Big Mother 62 - Ready Alert (USS Preble (DLG-15))

Pilot – LT	Franklin D. Lockett
Co-pilot – LT	Lewis H. Smalley Jr.
1st crew – AMS3	Allan L. Gaynor
2nd crew – AE-3	Gary M. Tremel

Rescue Report;

Alert Received	– 11:02 – Wingman Distress Call
Departed	- (1) 11:00 120°/ 55 miles (2) 11:05 140°/ 80 miles
On Scene	- Incorrect Vector too many controllers
Located Survivors	- 11:45 Visual in hands of enemy

USS Reeves (DLG-24) Deck Log

08:33 Green deck to receive Big Mother 65
08:35 Helo on deck, pilot is LT Rolls
08:37 secured helo detail – commence refueling helo
08:42 secured refueling helo
11:00 stationed helo detail to launch Big Mother 65, pilot in water Brg 304° 58 miles
11:07 green deck

11:09 helo launched

A-7C corsair 156762 (AJ-404) Sidewinder-404 VA-86, (Sidewinders) USN,
USS America (CVA-66)

LT Cdr James Edward Sullivan (KIA)

Born: 11-11-1942 Wall – Panel 01W – Row 085
Body returned – 8-14-1985

A section of Corsairs set off on an armed reconnaissance mission on the lookout for water-borne logistic craft just off the coast of North Vietnam. About 25 miles north of Vinh the aircraft made a low-level identification run over a ship when Lt Cdr Sullivan's aircraft was hit by automatic weapons fire. The aircraft burst into flames when its ordnance or a fuel tank was hit. The pilot ejected seconds before the port wing separated from the aircraft. Lt Cdr Sullivan was observed to be picked up by enemy boats but was last seen face down in one of the boats and may have been killed or drowned. Radio Hanoi reported the death of an American airmen on this day, which apparently referred to Lt Cdr Sullivan. His remains were eventually handed over by the Vietnamese on 14 August 1986.⁽⁵⁾

Statement of LT. K.R. ROLLS Pilot of "BIG MOTHER" 65

On 29 October 1972 while aboard TRIPLE THREAT (USS REEVES DLG-25) a SAR ALERT was sounded over the 1-MC. My crew and I ran to the flight deck, started the helo and were airborne within 5 minutes, at approximately 1105. We received a vector of 330/50, and immediately headed for the scene. We contacted an airborne E-2 on SAR common and got a new vector approximately 280/50.

While enroute we readied our minigun and M-60 forward. Upon test firing, the minigun jammed. The first crewman began working on it in a futile attempt to repair it.

We asked how far "feet wet" the survivor was and his condition. The controller responded that the downed pilot was 20 miles off the beach and had a slightly wounded hand. We estimated we would arrive on the scene in 20 minutes flying at our maximum airspeed of 135 knots IAS.

We entered the area 20 minutes later, planning to contact the On Scene Commander. Since we were now approximately 5 miles off the coast, we recognized the previous call of 20 miles "feet wet" was erroneous and asked for a new position. The airborne controller steered us south for one mile. At this point, Home Office informed us the pilot was approximately 2 miles off the beach around numerous fishing boats. There were 100-150 fishing boats in the BRANDON BAY area and we asked for a positive visual steer to the pilot. After another guess-work vector from Home Office, as we were attempting to contact the On-Scene Commander, the airborne controller informed us that OSC had left the SAR scene to tank and "would be right back". We searched unsuccessfully for the remaining 5 minutes until OSC returned. OSC attempted to direct us to the survivor by calling out as landmarks two muddy areas in the water resulting from bombs he had dropped earlier. Since we were at 100 feet AGL, we couldn't spot the marks.

In all, approximately 10 minutes were wasted searching unsuccessfully for the survivor, while the OSG was tanking. At no time, were we informed that there were two boats with soldiers launched from the shore approximately two miles away. At no time did the airborne controller inform us that the OSC intended to leave the scene before we had a visual positive location of the survivor.

When OSC returned from his tanker, we were still approximately four miles from the survivor. He vectored us to the area the survivor had been when he left the scene 10 minutes prior. OSG informed us that it appeared to him the survivor had been taken aboard one of the fishing boats which was now headed into shore. He vectored us to the boat and we prepared to make an approach in an attempt to rescue the captive pilot.

I called for and got M-60 machine guns and M-16 fire as we commenced our approach on the two small fishing boats. One of which was believed to contain the survivor. During the approach BM 65 received sporadic small arms fire from all around, and automatic fire from the beach, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ to a mile away. I directed the fire near the boats as a show of force to intimidate the fisherman into giving up the survivor without resistance.

To our surprise, as we pulled into a hover close on the suspected boats, I observed 5 or 6 men in the boat to stand up and commence firing automatic hand-held weapons. I reported we were taking small arms at point-blank range and my crew returned fire from the forward M-60 position and the co-pilots window with M-16.

As the helicopter pulled into a hover, it yawned right and pitched up, and I observed that I had lost my ASE (automatic stabilization equipment). I maintained control of the helo throughout the evolution and was in the process of evaluating the overall situations. I have observed that the gunners appeared to be uniformed soldiers. My crewman stated that he believed he observed the American pilot in the boat from which we were taking fire. I told my crew to use caution in returning fire so as not to hit the survivor.

At this moment, in a hover over the boats, I noticed by #2 engine oil pressure decreasing, my #2 torque fluctuating, and the oil temperature beginning to rise. I realized I had lost the #2 engine and broke the hover immediately, and attained flying speed. At 60 knots and 300 feet AGL I asked my co-pilot to secure the #2 engine which he did. I immediately informed the OSC and airborne controller that we were breaking off, stated I had an engine shot out, also informed Home Office that there were uniformed soldiers with small arms in the boat.

The airborne controller switched us to REDCROWN Control who, vectored us to PAWTUCKET (USS KITTY HAWK), the nearest carrier at 115/126. We asked for an escort, squawked emergency, and headed for PAWTUCKET. An A-6 from USS AMERICA escorted us until we were joined by KITTY HAWK ANGEL 004, for the last 50 miles. En-route, we jettisoned our remaining ammunition, topped No. 1 engine to maximum, and dumped 300 lbs. of fuel while on final.

At 1335, we made an uneventful landing on PAWTUCKET.

COMMENTS:

1. We lost 3-5 minutes initially because of the manner in which TRIPLE THREAT called flight quarters. They never called "SAR ALERT".

2. We lost a couple of minutes due to our original vector, which was approximately 50 degrees off. We followed this vector for approximately 5 minutes.
3. We were not aware the survivor was only 2 miles off the shore until we reached the scene.
4. We were never told that there were enemy boats en-route to the survivor from the shore.
5. While we knew the OSC was low on fuel, we had no idea he was going to leave the scene prior to our arrival thereby losing visual contact with the survivor. Although we had established voice communications with the OSC on 282.8 prior to our arrival on the scene, he did not give us a visual steer to the pilot until he returned from tanking.
6. We searched in vain for 8-10 minutes in the bay, during which time the survivor was taken aboard the boats. The absence of a visual vector at the scene proved critical.
7. We had to assume, from all information available to us at the time, that the survivor had been taken by a fishing boat, full of fisherman. Had we known the boat contained armed soldiers, we could have consolidated our SAR assets and had a better chance for the rescue.

KARL. R. ROLLS LT. USNR, PILOT IN COMMAND

Statement of LTJG E.H. FRAZIER Co-Pilot of "BIG MOTHER" 65

On 29 October, BIG MOTHER 65 was onboard the USS REEVES, DLG-24. At approximately 1100 hours an initial announcement of flight quarters came over the ships 1MC. Neither pilots or crewman were aware of a SAR situation until about two minutes later. The announcement was made that the helo was being launched to recover a downed aviator. Five minutes later, the helo was airborne and requested vectors to the scene of the SAR. TRIPLE THREAT gave an initial vector of 330/50 from them which later was found to be 45 degrees off. Three or four minutes later our vector was changed to 285 degrees/45 by an airborne E-2 controller. The backup helo was also airborne and vectored towards the scene of the SAR. Enroute, the primary helo requested location and condition of downed pilot and was told he was 20 miles "feet wet" and had a hand wound. Ten minutes later, we received word the pilot was approximately 2 miles "feet wet" and in the vicinity of numerous fishing vessels. Upon our arrival at the scene, the On Scene Commander had just departed to refuel. We had received no prior word that the OSC would be departing nor did we receive any vectors from the OSC who was the only one to hold the survivor in visual control.

The primary helo was left in the area of BRANDON BAY with only "the E-2" to vector us to the survivor after 10 minutes of useless searching in the middle and southern end of the bay. The On Scene Commander returned and proceeded to vector us to the northern end of the bay towards two small fishing vessels which were believed to have picked up the survivor. As we approached the two vessels, both the second crewman and myself were firing in front of the boats in an attempt to prevent them from reaching the beach which was only $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away. As the helo approached, a hover, 4-5 armed, uniformed soldiers stood up and started firing hand held, small automatic weapons. We immediately lost our ASE and as we started to move off #2 engines oil pressure was seen dropping and #2 engine torques was fluctuating. Upon attaining single engine flying airspeed of 70 knots and 300 feet of altitude #2 engine was secured. The backup helo was called in and 65 headed south out of the bay. We switched to the pilot at ship control and stated our condition and initiated to return to the nearest carrier. The picket ship control and stated our condition and initiated to return to the nearest carrier. The picket ship control gave us vectors of 115 at 125 to the USS KITTY HAWK CVA-63. Enroute, we were escorted by an A-6 and plane guard helo, we arrived at the KITTY HAWK after an hour and 45 minutes of single engine flight, dumped ammo and fuel, topped the engine and LT ROLLS made an uneventful single engine, ASE off landing.

PROBLEMS BESET THE SAR EFFORT FROM THE START

1. We were not prepositioned as it was not an ALPHA STRIKE and had to fly over fifty miles at 135 knots to reach the scene.
2. Two or three minutes were lost in the announcement of "FLIGHT QUARTERS" vice "SAR ALERT" when onboard TRIPLE THREAT.
3. One or two minutes lost in the initial vector being 45 degrees off the 285 degree vector we finally received.
4. The minigun had jammed on a test fire enroute to the SAR and remained useless during the entire SAR evolution.
5. We were not informed the survivor was endangered by vessels launched from the beach.
6. The On Scene Commander was not on the scene upon our arrival and had not given us any vectors. Hence, 10 minutes more wasted in searching the southern part of the bay.
7. There was no fighter or attack aircraft near enough to relieve the On Scene Commander when he departed for fuel.

The On Scene Commander stated (not to the helo at the time) that the pilot was in the water and vessels were being launched from the beach just prior to his departure from the scene for fuel. It is my opinion that we could have gotten there and retrieved the downed pilot if it had not been for the time lost in the previously stated problems as we arrived just as OSC departed for fuel.

EARLY H. FRAZIER LTJG, USNR, COPILOT

Statement of ADJ2 R.J. FORD 1ST CREWMAN "BIG MOTHER" 65

It was 1105 when we got the SAR call while aboard the USS REEVES. Approximately 1115 we lifted off the deck and got vectors towards the scene.

After setting up the weapons, I asked for permission to test fire the minigun. It got five rounds off before jamming. From then on I tried unjamming and reloading the gun. We asked for an update on the situation and were informed that the pilot was two miles off the beach. Still trying to get the minigun to work and fighting the hot exhaust gases I periodically looked for the survivor.

As one time we thought we spotted him but after further investigation we found out it was just a fishing boat. After the On Scene Commander returned to the scene after a brief absence, he directed us toward a fishing boat about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile off the beach. We then realized that the survivor was in the boat.

I was still working on the minigun with no success. The pilot said over ICS that we were taking small arms fire and to shoot toward the boats. I then got on the extra M-60. We took a hit and the helo began to yaw and pitch, moments later the pilot noticed No. 2 engine losing oil pressure. The second crewman ADJ3 ERICKSON was shooting the M-60 out the front port gunner-door from the time we started to take fire until we pulled out with No. 2 engine inoperative and no ASE control. We then proceeded to the USS KITTY HAWK 125 miles away on one engine. We arrived at the KITTY HAWK at 1330. End of statement.

ROBERT J. FORD ADJ2 1ST CREWMAN

Statement of ADJ3 D.L. ERICKSON 2ND CREWMAN "BIG MOTHER" 65

1105 SAR ALERT

We launched off from TRIPLE THREAT within 10 minutes. I was told that it would be a piece of cake a couple miles off the coast that's what came over the radio. I was getting into my swim gear while we were taking off then myself and the 1st crewman started setting up the guns, just regular procedure, the mini-gun jammed and checked FORD was taking care of that I was clearing the M-60 up forward. When I was done with my job, I started searching for the pilot and watching the gauges. We were pulling around 130 knots. We were on the scene about 20 minutes after take off. It took about 5 or 10 minutes to locate pilot or just get in the general area. We were told that he was getting into or was already in a fishing boat. As we approached we were taking fire (small arms) from the shore about ½ mile to 1 mile away it was falling short 50 to 75 feet short! The pilot said to fire around the fishing boats that we thought had the pilot. We were also receiving small arms fire from at least 2 fishing boats as we flew over one of the fishing boats I saw a figure spread eagle on the bottom of the boat with 2 or 3 men standing around him. It happened too fast for proper identification. The pilot said we'd been hit and had to get out of there. We lost #2 engine and ASE. We started back to CVA-63. It was the closest carrier on the way back. We made ready for emergency landing. We made a good landing and that was that.

DONALD D. ERICKSON ADJ3, 2ND CREWMAN

Statement of LT FRANKLIN D. LOCKETT Pilot of "BIG MOTHER" 62

At approximately 1055 on 29 October 1872, I launched off of the USS PREBLE for a PAX transfer to the USS COCHRAN and training. We became airborne and I elected to dump some fuel before my hover transfer to the USS COCHRAN. I dropped between 500 and 800 lbs. As we started our approach to the USS COCHRAN we heard a guard transmission of a pilot was in the water. I continued the approach and dropped off my passenger.

We then turned North and climbed to get better radio transmission with a Picket Ship nearer the scene. We were told to proceed enroute to this ship. At this time, we heard the primary helo preparing to launch off of this picket ship. We got a good TACAN cut on this ship and were approximately 25 miles away.

The primary helo appeared to be closer to the scene and was vectored to the scene. We closed at max airspeed continuing to be quiet over the radios so as not to interfere with the transmission necessary for the primary helo. We got close enough to the SAR Picket Ship to get a good vector to the scene and was ordered to hold 15 miles on that heading. The SAR effort was slowly deteriorating so I continued at max airspeed toward the survivor.

At approximately 5 to 10 miles out, I spotted the primary helo and headed towards him. At about 3 miles, the primary helo was breaking away and we were vectored in. I made a few jinxing passes over a number of fishing boats to see if I saw anyone that resembled an American. The O.S.C. vectored me to two partially isolated fishing boats.

A couple of passes around these boats made me suspicious that the American was aboard one of them as we pulled in for a better look. My crewman opened up on one of the guys in the front of the boat. I distinctly saw one person in the bottom of the boat that was wearing flight boots. When my crewman fired this short burst of round everyone jumped overboard and the figure I felt was the American remained immobile in the boat. I reported this to the airborne controller. I made a couple more circles to see if the figure in the boat would move. During the entire episode we were taking heavy small arms fire.

I then headed out of the area about 5 miles and report everything I observed. I reported I had approximately 5 to 10 minutes more play time but was headed to the Picket Ship for refueling. Enroute we were given a vector to another Picket Ship that was closer. I suggested to this ship that I felt the SAR effort should be terminated unless there were some new developments.

PROBLEMS:

1. The secondary helo should have been vectored directly to the area.
2. I had no likeable alternative to take once the survivor was in the hands of the enemy.

Franklin D. Lockett LT USNR Pilot

Statement of LT L.H. SMALLEY, Jr. Co-Pilot of "BIG MOTHER" 62 Back-up Helo

At 1055 on Sunday 29 October the backup helicopter launched from the USS PREBLE, DLG-15 to take her Commanding Officer and the Chaplain to their shotgun the USS Cochran, DDG-21. Just prior to takeoff the PREBLE had a small fire in Radio Central that disabled all of the ship's communications. Since the COCHRAN was only 2-3 miles away and we still had a full fuel load onboard, for safety sake we dumped 500-600 lbs. of fuel before making the personnel transfer. As we came onto final a transmission came over guard that a plane was down. We expedited the personnel transfer and climbed to about 2,000 feet to call the USS REEVES, DLG-24. We made contact and asked if we could be of assistance and they told us to close on them. It was approximately 25 miles at 355 degrees to them. So, we flew as fast as we could toward them. We heard the primary helicopter launching and heard them get a vector of 330/340 at 53. Pretty soon the controlling aircraft came up and changed their vector to about 290 or so. We then changed our heading to about 320 hoping to intercept the correct radial. The REEVES came up some time later and gave us a vector of 302 to the SAR scene. We were told to hold at 15 miles from the REEVES, when we reached 15 miles we just kept going and the REEVES told us to orbit but we kept on going towards the scene. The whole time we were monitoring SAR Common and SAR Secondary on our radios. This gave us a running narrative on the SAR scene as the Scene Commander was talking to the primary rescue helo. As we get about 6-9 miles from the scene, we held off and made one orbit and then the primary helo said they were hit and request the secondary helo come in. There was approximately 100-150 small fishing boats in the area. As we started searching the boats for the survivor, the Scene Commander directed us to the two boats closest to the shore. As we rolled in on them the people in them just sat and watched us whereas the other boat inhabitants covered in the bottom of the boat all jumped overboard. As we got alongside, I saw one man start to pick up what looked like a gun then he went out of my field of sight. I next heard the minigun shoot and we came around again and I saw everyone jump in the water and could see two bodies floating next to the boat. There was one figure by itself laying in the bottom of the boat. The only thing I could tell was he was dressed in dark green and he didn't move. During the time, I could see him, the survivor did not appear ambulatory. The whole time we were taking small arms fire from, I assume, both the shore and the other fishing boats. We had about an hours' worth of

fuel but thought the REEVES was the closest ship at about 60 miles away. We told the On Scene Commander that we couldn't pick the survivor up if he wasn't ambulatory under the present situation. As we departed for the REEVES we were told the LONG BEACH was closer and we preceded there for fuel and were subsequently told to shut down. Later on about an hour or so later, the SAR was cancelled. After shutting down on the LONG BEACH we surveyed the helicopter for battle damage and found one 2" hole on the port side aft approximately 3 feet below the aft gunners window.

LEWIS H. SMALLEY, JR. LT. USNR, COPILOT

Statement of AMS3 A.L. GAYNOR 1ST CREWMAN of "BIG MOTHER" 62 Back-up Heli

Upon hearing that a pilot was down and in the water, we finished our hover transfer to the USS COCHRAN to get rid of our two PAX. Then while proceeding to the SAR scene the second crewman and I got set up in back. We reported to the pilot that our weapons and rescue gear were ready.

We got clearance to go in and attempt to locate and rescue the survivor who by this time we were pretty sure was in one of the many North Vietnamese fishing boats. We started taking fire as soon as we got in to the bay. I reported it to the pilot and we started looking over all the boats in the vicinity that the survivor was thought to be. We flew over two small boats which looked to contain five to six man apiece. All were dressed in dark clothes. They all looked up at us and some were paddling the boat.

I saw what I thought looked like a Caucasian face and told the pilot so. He immediately turned the helo around and we flew over the boats again. I tried to spot a light-skinned face or a flight suit or a piece of survival gear such as an LPA-1 or something that looked like it belonged to a pilot. I did not see anything but the five or six men again. We continued to fly around the two boats what I thought to be two or three more times. Maybe more, maybe less.

About the second to the last time around a man was kneeling in the front of the boat and was holding a rifle which he pointed at us. I fired a quick burst with the minigun at a point about twenty five yards to his right side. I had hoped that the burst would scare him and make him lose any thoughts of firing at us. I saw flashes that looked like someone lighting matches at the end of the barrel. That's about as close as I can describe his muzzle flashes. I immediately opened fire with the minigun at 2000 RPM at the boat. I made one pass across and one pass back. I could see my tracers going into the boat and the water. I lost sight of the boat for a second and we came back around to check it out. We saw one body floating face down with blood all around it and some men just laying in the water not moving and some hanging onto the boat. We were still taking heavy fire which looked to be small arms and maybe some heavier stuff. I saw what looked like shore battery fire or bombs being dropped in the water. A boom went off behind us and the helo lurched suddenly. I looked around quick for hits and saw none.

I guess that's when the pilot decided to get out of the area. Upon landing on REDCROWN we found one hole caused apparently by shrapnel.

I honestly don't think we saw any sign of the survivor, who was apparently unconscious or incapacitated. We saw no survival gear, no raft, no one waving their arms at us or anything to attract our attention. We were flying low and fast and zigzagging quite a bit which made it very difficult to spot anything.

This report is to the best of my knowledge and everything is as I saw it. The whole thing seemed like a dream and things were moving pretty fast.

ALLAN L. GAYNOR AMS3 1ST CREWMAN

Statement of AE3 (AC) Gary M. TREMEL 2nd CREWMAN of "BM" 62 Back-up Helo

We were on approach to USS COCHRAN en-route to a passenger hoist transfer when we heard that a pilot was in the water. We made a hasty transfer, got vectors, and proceeded to the scene. It was approximately 60 to 70 miles from our present position.

As BM 65 was approaching the scene, we were held approximately 10 miles off. We knew 65 was taking small arms fire and that there were many small boats in the area. We had all weapons set up and were prepared to provide cover for 65, if needed. As 65 approached the rescue, Rescap informed us that the pilot had been picked up by a small boat and was headed for shore. 65 made a surveillance run and immediately took small arms fire which rendered a hit, causing 65 to lose ASE and No. 2 engine. As 65 left the scene, we arrived.

By this time, a triple-A site was sited by Rescap and it began to fire on us. We were told that one of the two boats closest to the beach contained the survivor. Our approach which was low and slow brought us to within 300 yards of the beach. We made several circles around the two boats keeping the starboard side with the mini-gun inward. I was positioned at the port-forward M-60 station in swim gear. Each time I was facing the beach, I could hear small arms and automatic weapons and see numerous splashes in the water. I could also see smoke flashes and following larger splashes in the water sometimes leaving 6 foot columns of water. Most of the fire seemed to be falling short, although we felt two explosions very close to us causing the aircraft to shudder, and we took one small arms hit on our port side.

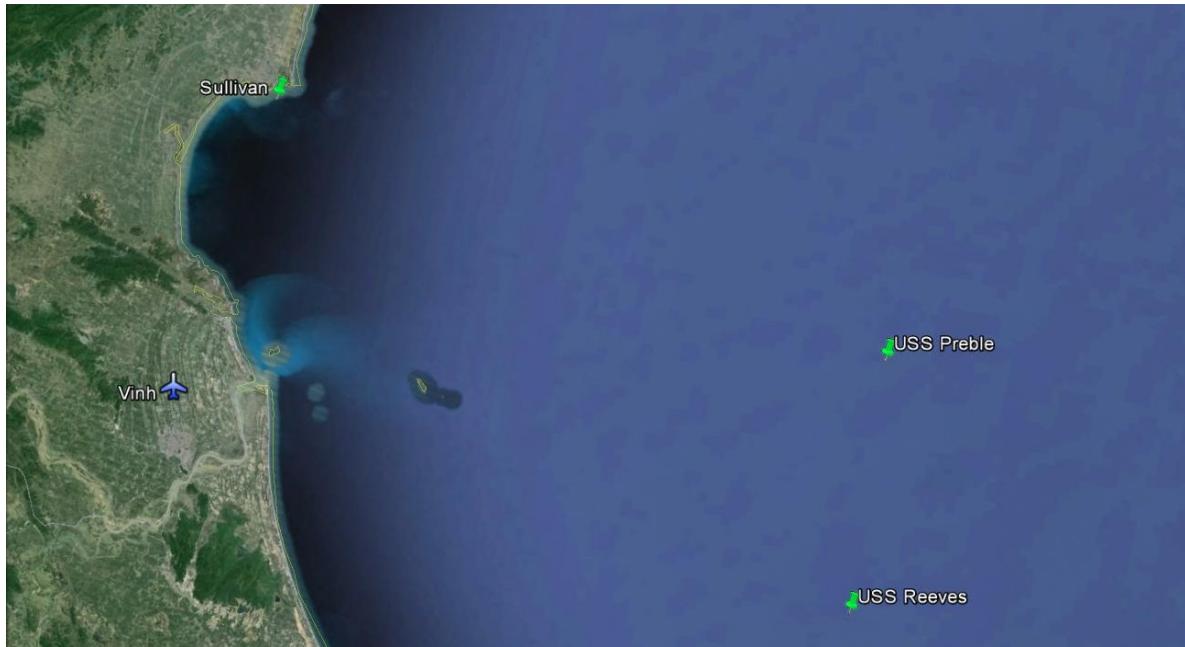
During our circling the pilot, LT LOCKETT, though he saw the survivor in one of the boats. We stayed in the area trying to get a positive visual. During this time, the first crewman, AMS3 GAYNOR fired a short blast, (approximately 200 rounds) on the mini-gun. It alarmed me and I was watching the fishing boats on my side very closely. I was ready to fire, if necessary, but I saw no hostile action. Most were out of their boats and trying to take cover in the water. Some were holding their hands together as if praying. It wasn't necessary for me to fire even a warning shot.

During the time we were in close, I witnessed one strafing run on the beach, one smoke dropped and two bombs dropped on the beach. This did not seem to suppress the fire though.

After being in the area taking fire for 5 minutes or more, we had neither voice communications with the survivor, positive visual sighting or indication that he was conscious or alive. LT LOCKETT decided that we

should call off the SAR at that time. With approximately one hour of fuel remaining, we were given vectors to the USS LONG BEACH.

GARY M. TREMEL AE3, USN



- 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 Rescue Log

29-Oct-1972 (Zulu) (+8 hours for local)

29/0309 SIDEWINDER 404 confirmed down by MOTEI

29/0315 SIDEWINDER 404 Sidewinder 404, Fr JR BIG MOTHER on the way. WX in area is 35 120 (B/C WX)

29/0345 SIDEWINDER 404 Fm JK – K-25 reports that NAVY aircraft in area say a fishing boat has P/U the survivor and they have that boat insight. Big Mothers are going to try and get him.

29/0355 SIDEWINDER 404 Fm JK – one of the Big Mothers lost #2 eng is RTB to ship. Second Big Mother still trying for recovery. There are two fishing boats in the area.

29/0405 SIDEWINDER 404 Fm JK – JR & K-25 are launching JGs & Sandys (Ch-77) ATT. ETE be 2+00. Second Big Mother is going back to refuel. NAVY A-7s in area. Keeping it clean with 20mm. As second Big Mother approached the boat (before leaving) everyone jumped out except the survivor. ATT there has been no confirmed voice or beeper.

29/0445 SIDEWINDER 404 Fm JK – both boats are going toward shore. Survivor believed to be in western most boat. A-7s making passes between them and shore.

29/0510 SIDEWINDER 404 Fm JK – Boats are about 100 yds form shore, A-7s taking ground fire from small shoal on shore. They are still expending 20mm in area.

29/0520 SIDEWINDER 404 Fm JK – The boats have reached shore and the place is FULL of NVA. ALL FORCES RTB ATT.

HC-7 Attempted Rescue – 29-Oct-1972
USAF Rescue Report – emailed 1-20-2020

Hey Ron. That was the perspective of some USAF pilots. It supports everything else previous, but leaves out some details and possibly adds a few. They say the boat with the pilot made it back to shore – after all the occupants except the pilot jumped out? Guppy blasted them all to hell. Two boats? I only heard of one – except for the gazillion other fishing boats that were in the same bay. Still interesting after all these years...
Keep up the good work, Ron. See you at the reunion. Cracker-ASS

It's nice to hear from you again. I thought you was froze solid back there in Oklahoma. I got Ron's USAF report and, ironically, I just finished writing the story of that day, as seen through mine and Bob Ford's eyes. My first question is this: Was the A-7 pilot alive or dead when the boats reached the shore?

The air force said everyone jumped out of the boat except the pilot. Maybe he was dead and couldn't jump out of the boat. I distinctly remember being told by an HC-7 pilot, the day after the incident, that he heard in the A-7 pilot's ready room that the pilot was carrying a 9mm pistol and a 357 magnum and a hundred rounds of ammo and had vowed never to be taken alive. I think he was killed in a gunfight with the NVA in a boat and they pulled his body on board.

Before we arrived on the scene, we were monitoring the guard channel and we heard the A-7 pilot talking to his wingman and say he was being shot at and he was shooting back and was injured in one hand. A day or two later the Stars and Stripes featured an article from Hong Kong that read "Strafing Aircraft Kill Own Pilot." And did I hear or read that the pilot's body has been returned to the states? Thanks for the article, Ron. I've always wondered what happened to LCDR. Sullivan.

"GUPPY"

I often wondered what happened to that pilot. I'm also relieved to know that we didn't kill him "Guppy"

Thanks Ron,

I don't know if I told you or not but I was the copilot on the second Big Mother and Frank Lockett was the HAC. We shot up the boat and killed all the NVA on board. They did not just jump overboard. I was based at NAS South Weymouth MA in 1985-86 when LCDR Sullivan's remains were returned for burial in Hull, MA. LCDR Gary Croteau who worked for me was assigned as his CACO Officer. He had the autopsy report from the Hawaii DNA lab that was identifying remains. I had been very concerned we may have killed him when we shot up the boat. The autopsy report said he was killed by a blunt force trauma to the base of his skull. It seems the NVA killed him as they pulled him into the boat. I was relieved to find that out 13-14 years after the incident.

I thought the rest of the crew might like know that as well.

See you in Pensacola.

Lew Smalley

To all,

Thank you for contributing to this story. I have often thought of that day and wondered a lot about, "what if". However, I conclude with, "we did our best under the circumstances and we came back alive." Although, it was out of hands to rescue Cdr. Sullivan. I still say, "Thanks to our Heavenly Father".

Franklin Lockett