

“Vietnam – Air Losses”

United States Air Force
Navy and Marine corps
Fixed-Wing Aircraft Losses
In Southeast Asia 1961-1973

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RA-5C 156633 RVAH-13 USN USS Enterprise

LT Cdr Alfred Howard Agnew (POW)
LT Michael Firestone Hailfley (KIA)

An RA-5C had just completed its photo run over a POL storage site when its escort warned of a MiG in the Vigilante's eight o'clock position. The escort vectored the Vigilante towards the coast and turned to attack the MiG. However, before the MiG could be engaged it fired a missile which hit the Vigilante. The aircraft caught fire and crashed into the sea. The pilot ejected and was captured but his NFO was killed in the incident. Lt Cdr Agnew was released on 29 March 1973. Lt Cdr Agnew had served in AEW and ASW squadrons before converting to the reconnaissance role in the RA-5C. This was the 90th and last US aircraft shot down by a MiG during the war. This was also the last of 26 RA-5C Vigilantes to be lost in Southeast Asia.

MISSION OF COMBAT SAR COULD BE CARRIED OUT SAFELY AND EFFECTIVELY DESPITE THE TEMPO OF OPERATIONS.

ON 27 DECEMBER, AN RA-5C ATTACHED TO RVAH-13 EMBARKED ON THE USS ENTERPRISE WAS HIT BY A SAM AND A CHUTE WAS OBSERVED GOING THROUGH THE OVERCAST. A BEEPER BUT NO VOICE WAS BROADCAST AND A RADAR FIX DETERMINED THE SURVIVORS WERE LOCATED FIVE MILES OFF THE RED RIVER ESTUARY. CTU 77.0.0 EMBARKED ABOARD TRUXTUN REQUESTED THE LAUNCH. LCDR WALSH AND CREW IMMEDIATELY LAUNCHED FROM HORNE. HOWEVER, THE CRITERIA OF POSITIVE LOCATION WAS NOT MET AND THE "BIG MOTHER" CREW COULD NOT PROCEED UNLESS SPECIFIC APPROVAL FOR A SEARCH MISSION WAS OBTAINED FROM CTG 77.0 WHO GRANTED IT. LCDR WALSH AND CREW PROCEEDED 30 MILES, IFR, WITH POSITIVE RADAR CONTROL FROM HORNE TO THE LAST KNOWN STRAIGHT LINE LOCATION OF THE BEEPER. THE AREA WAS THEN CLEARED OF SURFACE CONTACTS BY AN E1B ATTACHED TO VAW-111. A SMOKE BOMB WAS THEN DROPPED, DESCENT WAS MADE TO 100 FT. AND AN EXPANDING SQUARE SEARCH PATTERN COMMENCED. ABOVE THE OVERCAST RESCAP WAS ORBITTING AND THE E1B MAINTAINED CONSTANT RADAR SURVEILLANCE. AT THIS TIME TRUXTUN LOST ITS NTDS DATA LINK AND CONTROL OF THE SAR WAS ASSUMED BY THE E1B. POOR VISIBILITY AND A LOW CEILING MADE A VISUAL SEARCH DIFFICULT BUT THESE DIFFICULTIES HELPED PROLONG THE SEARCH TIME ON STATION AS THE HELO WAS VIRTUALLY INVISIBLE FROM THE BEACH. AS THE SQUARE SEARCH EXPANDED, THE BEACH LINE WAS SIGHTED AND THE "BIG MOTHER" WITHDREW TO THE SAFETY OF THE GLOOMY OVERCAST. MEANWHILE, THE E1B IN CONJUNCITON WITH HORNE TRIANGULATED A NEW POSITION PROJECTED 3 MILES UP THE RIVER. THE "BIG MOTHER" THEN MADE AN UN-OPPOSED HIGHSPEED, LOW ALTITUDE RUN TO THE NEW POSITION WHERE A NUMBER OF SAMPANS WERE SIGHTED. IT APPEARED EVIDENT AT THIS TIME THAT MORE SEARCHING WOULD BE FRUITLESS AND LCDR WALSH RECOMMENDED CANCELLING THE SAR. LCDR AGNEW AND LT HAIFLEY WERE THEN PRESUMED MISSING IN ACTION.