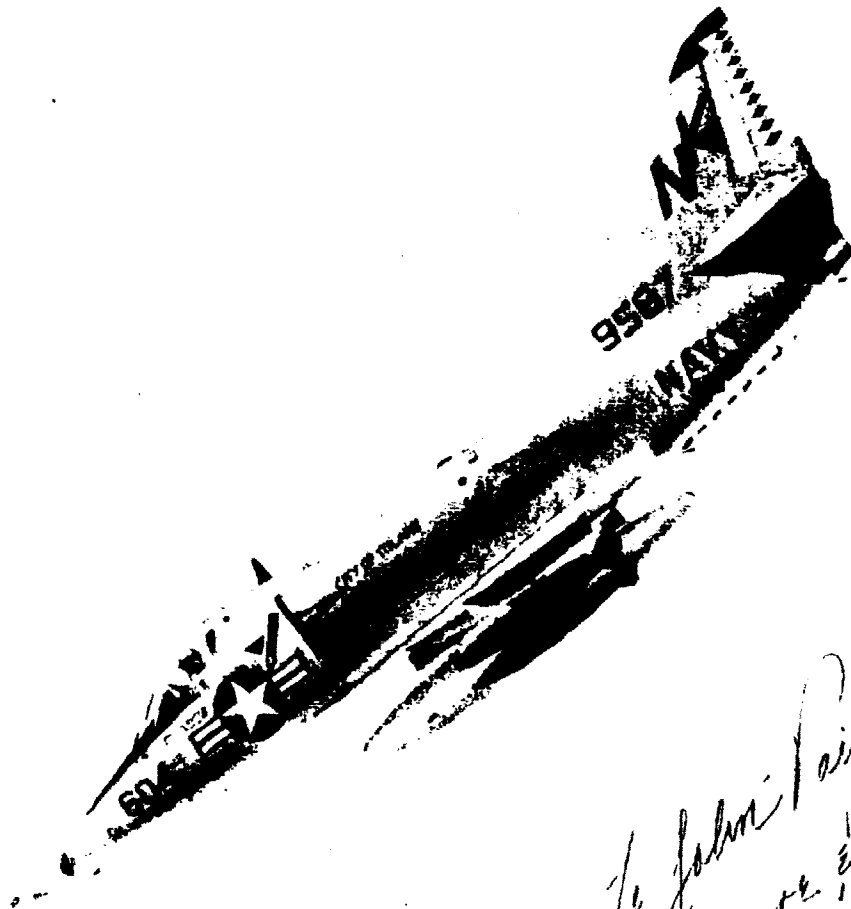


THE LOSS OF "BUSY BEE 604"



*To John Paisley
Remore, & A's forever!
Stay Well.
F. Hugh Magee
CDR USN (Ret)
8/7/91*

The events of 25 June, 1966
as experienced by LT F. Hugh Magee USN, Attack Squadron 146

Illustrated by Max Coulson

The Loss Of "Busy Bee 604"

THE SETTING

Busy Bee 604 was lost mid-morning on 25 June, 1966. "She" was a gray, sleek, Skyhawk "Charlie" (A4C) with Navy assigned Bureau Number 149567; mechanically in "tip-top" shape, and to me, a very beautiful machine. Today, the 25th of June, 1990, the 24th anniversary of her demise, she rests in peace in the soft mud at the bottom of the Gulf of Tonkin with, fortunately for me, a cockpit devoid of canopy, seat, and pilot. During the last minute of her life, I was not too sure it would end that way.

At the time of the incident, I had completed 118 strike missions on the 1966 combat cruise, my first. I was then a senior Lieutenant and qualified combat section leader with Attack Squadron 146 operating from the deck of the "supercarrier" USS Ranger (CVA-61).

On 20 June, word was received that Washington had finally opened up [authorized major strikes on] the Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants (POL) facilities in the vicinity of the North Vietnamese capitol of Hanoi and the major port city of Haiphong. Most "juicy" targets such as these had been off-limits ever since our arrival off the coast of North Vietnam (NVN) in late January 1966. Air Wing 14 flight crews were jubilant that we would finally be allowed to risk our asses on worthwhile targets.

Plans were immediately drawn up, attack charts prepared, and flight crew briefings initiated for our squadron's portion of a mighty "ALPHA" strike on the Haiphong POLs. The overall interservice strike plan called for a simultaneous massive raid - with the U.S. Air Force F105Ds to hit the Hanoi POLs which were located nearly 60 miles northwest up the Red River from Haiphong, while two strike groups from the carriers RANGER and CONSTELLATION struck the POL facilities at Haiphong and Do Son on the coast. The weather had to be near perfect for such a sizeable simultaneous strike to be successful.

VA-146 was to contribute 10 strike aircraft (six MK-81 250# bombs each), plus two fully-armed manned spares to the 40 aircraft RANGER strike group. VA-55, our A4E sister squadron, would contribute a like number of aircraft armed with 10 rocket pods each (a mix of 4-shot 5" ZUNI, and 19-shot 2.75" TINY TIM rocket pods.) Naturally, for a strike of such importance, the 12 most experienced pilots were selected from within VA-146, and I was chosen to fly section lead for the squadron C.O., CDR Al Schaufelberger, and LT(jg) Jim Knollmueller was assigned as my wingman. CDR Fred Palmer, Commander, Air Wing FOURTEEN, was the overall RANGER strike group leader. He elected to fly a VF-142 Phantom, so CDR Schaufelberger would physically lead the strike, as the slowest aircraft (the A4Cs) usually took the navigation lead to insure that the rest of the strike group would not have problems keeping up.

The first strike was on for the 21st of June. It was launched, but bad weather had blanketed the northern provinces of NVN, so the strike was split up and diverted to alternate pre-briefed targets. The adverse weather continued over the next few days, and the massive hit continued to be cancelled day after day, sometimes without even getting the chance to launch. On June 25th, the strike was on again!

THE STRIKE

After about the fifth complete and thorough briefing on the conduct of this huge coordinated strike, we knew all the details by heart. The time-on-target was set for just after 10 AM Hanoi time. The two carriers had moved much farther to the north and west than usual so that fuel states would not be a critical factor, especially for the Phantoms, which were great fighter aircraft, but horrible "fuel suckers!"

The weather reconnaissance aircraft (an RA5C Vigilante) had not reported back by launch time (0915), so the launch commenced on schedule. On a strike launch of this size, it takes about 30 minutes using all four catapults, to get the strike and support aircraft launched and rendezvoused. This was done on schedule, and the group headed out on course for Haiphong, about a 23 minute trip to the target.

About five minutes after striking out on course, the weather reconnaissance aircraft reported low and middle clouds over the target areas and the strike was once again cancelled. We were directed to break up into divisions and proceed on secondary missions. Our particular division was pre-briefed to conduct road reconnaissance in an area between 10 and 30 miles south of Thanh Hoa, a large, well defended coastal city in central NVN.

While proceeding to our assigned area, a call on strike frequency advised all aircraft that an A6 Intruder from CONSTELLATION had been shot down in the vicinity of Vinh (about 60 miles south of our patrol area), and that the pilot and his bombardier-navigator (BN) had ejected, were in the water about 1/4 mile off the Vinh beach, and were under fire from mortar positions lined along the beach. Our flight was ordered by GRAY EAGLE (RANGER) to proceed to the area and report to CROWN ALPHA, the Search and Rescue (SAR) on-scene commander, to lend assistance as needed.

Shifting our flight of four to SAR frequency, the Skipper turned the flight to the southwest heading towards Vinh and contacted CROWN ALPHA, who advised that the two crewmen from CUPCAKE 406 were in the water just offshore from Vinh, and were under mortar fire from bunkers along the beach. He further advised that RANGER was in the process of launching a SH3A Sea King rescue helicopter, callsign FETCH 53, and requested a series of mortar suppression bombing runs on the beach positions. The NVN gunners were starting to "zero in" on the two survivors and they were in immediate peril!

The Skipper went to full power and the flight arrived on the scene within several minutes. Cleared for multiple mortar suppression runs, the decision was made to drop two 250# bombs on each run. We did not labor under the illusion that the mortar positions could or would be completely wiped out in time, the tactic was to try to keep their heads down and perhaps screw up their aiming while FETCH 53 effected the rescue.

As the flight was maneuvered to the north to set up for the bombing runs, I selected the two wing weapons stations, went to the BOMB position on the weapons function selector, armed the nose fuses, and turned the MASTER ARM switch on. I could see one survivor in the water; and several hundred yards toward the beach, a large greenish dye marker stain, but I could not see the second survivor.

When communicating within our division we were BUSY BEE 1, 2, 3, and 4. For communications outside the flight we were BUSY BEE plus "nose number" (I was BUSY BEE 604.) The Skipper called "BUSY BEE 1 rolling in"; shortly thereafter BUSY BEE 2 called rolling in, then it was my turn.

THE HIT

Up to this point, no flak had been observed; that is, no hostile opposition other than the mortar fire from the beach. We were keenly aware; however, that Vinh was a very active anti-aircraft area with all sizes of weapons emplacements ranging from large numbers of small arms through 37, 57, 85, and 105 millimeter radar-aimed flak sites. Many Navy and Air Force aircraft had been previously lost around Vinh, and many more were to meet the same fate in that area before the air war was ended. The decision to make more than one run each was unusual in that hostile an area, but the circumstances of the survivors was such that, in my opinion, the decision was warranted.

I called "BEE 3 in" then rolled inverted at 9,000 feet, placing the bombsight crosshairs directly on the northernmost mortar emplacement. The mortars were oriented in a line along the beach roughly north to south. The bomb runs would be north to south so that any bombs falling short or long might affect adjacent mortar sites. This dive orientation also afforded us the option of an immediate turn to the left on pullout - to the safety of the gulf, if hit in the run. This foresight by the Skipper, at the minimum, was to save me from capture, and very possibly saved my life!

Streaking "down the chute" in a 45° dive, I heard BUSY BEE 2 call off target. There was little or no noticeable drift to the right or left as the speed increased, so I knew that there was little or no west or east crosswind component. As the altimeter unwound wildly through 4,800 feet and the airspeed stabilized at 450 knots indicated, I pickled the bomb release button twice, and felt the double thump of the bombs being ejected from the racks.

I immediately pulled the stick back, rammed the throttle to the stop while loading the aircraft to about 4 Gs, and pulled the nose up through the horizon, keeping the wings level while G-loaded. I remember hearing BUSY BEE 4 call rolling in about here (which is confirmed on the audio tape recording of the radio transmissions.)

As the nose climbed to about 30° above the horizon, I unloaded the Gs and at approximately 3,500 feet climbing and perhaps 420 knots decelerating, turned immediately hard to port. No sooner had I entered the turn when I felt a horrendous thump and explosion right beneath the cockpit. There was no doubt about what had happened. On a previous mission I had been hit by 37mm flak, but that impact was miniscule compared to this. At the instant of impact, the rudder pedals went limp and clanged forward to the stops, useless. I knew that the cabling had been severed. Then a thick black smoke began enveloping the cockpit. The flash of the hit and severity of the damage indicated a direct hit by an 85mm anti-aircraft shell.

At impact, some hot metal sprayed up through the floor and sides of the cockpit. I felt a warm, burning sensation in my right hand and stomach, but no pain at all. My right flight glove was shredded as was the "G-suit" over my stomach. I made the radio transmission "607, this is 604", the Skipper answered "Go". "Roger, I've taken a hit, it's getting pretty smoky in the cockpit and I have no left rudder at all."

BUSY BEE 4 (Jim Knollmueller) had seen the impact as he pulled off target, and was closing rapidly. He then made the most chilling radio transmission I have ever heard, calling "You're on fire on the port side below the cockpit, Hugh." The Skipper calls: "Get it out over the water." BEE 4 calls: "You're burning forward of the intake and the lower left hand portion of the cockpit, Hugh." I answered "Roger!" (What else can you say in reply?) BEE 4 calls "Recommend you jettison your ordnance."

I'll never forget how cool BEE 4's voice was throughout; it sure helped keep me calm in a rather ticklish situation. The time was 0951 (9:51 AM local).

By now the smoke was so thick in the cockpit, I couldn't see the instrument panel nor could I see out through the canopy. The engine continued running at full power for about 25 seconds after the hit, then suddenly, it quit. I shifted the pressurization switch to RAM AIR trying to clear out some of the smoke, then felt for and pulled the emergency generator which responded with a welcome thump and whine. I then pulled the yellow/black striped EMERGENCY JETTISON T-handle and blew everything (centerline 400 gallon drop tank and the four remaining bombs plus bomb racks.) The "whump" of the jettison was reassuring, as had the emergency generator not come on line, the electrically-powered jettison system would have been inoperative. With the drag of the tank, bombs, and racks gone, my speed would not decrease in the climb as rapidly.

BEE 4: "OK, you still have flames on the left side of the cockpit and down low." I answered "Roger, it sounds pretty bad, I'm going to have to get out." The Skipper responds

"Yes, don't fiddle around Hughie, once you're out over the water." An unidentified voice came up and said "Crown Alpha, there he goes, somebody CAP him!" BEE 4 immediately replied "I'm right with him."

At this point, I was in a slight dive, heading southeast at about 5,000 feet, estimated 330 knots about a mile from the beach. I was becoming very concerned that the fire still burning along the forward fuselage might torch off either the fuselage fuel tank (right behind my head with 1,600# remaining) or the wet-wing (2,000# remaining), and cause the aircraft to explode in flight. Not to worry! BEE 4 calls "Roger, get out now Hugh!" - and I did!

The next transmission (which I never heard) was, no doubt, a relief to the Skipper. "BEE 1, this is BEE 4 - good ejection, good parachute, repeat good parachute."

Without hesitation, I used the primary ejection method (the face curtain), as I was aware that with airspeed in excess of 300 knots, the ejection would be rough and I wanted to get max protection from wind-blast after ejection.

The canopy left cleanly and I simply felt a wild tumbling sensation, up was down, down was up. I was no more than a passenger at this point and felt like I was inside a clothes dryer. As I reached up to my left breast to pull the "rip-cord" (I couldn't beat the automatic chute opener), the chute was already on the way out. It opened with a horrendous snapping sound and shock, then stabilized the wild ride as things smoothed out. I looked up now at the fully blossomed, alternately-colored orange and white panels and saw that at least three panels had ripped out and were kind of flapping and snapping as I decelerated. The ride was now quiet and smooth. I remember thinking how glad I was that I was over the water, not only because the chances of rescue were so much better, but with the ripped panels, the rate of descent was going to be higher than desired and I stood a much better chance of avoiding further injury impacting in the water as opposed to touching down on land.

My next impression was how totally and serenely quiet it was. Just a slight rustling of the ripped panels and the far off sounding whoosh of jet engines. The whole scene of the incident was spread out below me. I could see the coastline clearly, the bombs were detonating along the mortar line, and I could see the two greenish dye markers of the downed Intruder crew of CUPCAKE 406. The markers appeared to be about 800 meters off the coast, and I was drifting down about 1,000 meters further out.

Fearing at first that an offshore breeze might drift me in toward the beach, I checked the smoke from the bomb detonations and realized thankfully, that there was little, if any adverse wind - that I would be OK in that regard. Very lucky!

THE RESCUE

My next concern was to prepare for water entry, and take action to present myself as small a target as possible once water entry was effected. I knew that the helicopter was enroute so I took some actions (some of which were initially criticized in the debrief), but in the end were considered justified.

The life raft was hanging on a yellow lanyard about 15 feet below me, attached to my parachute harness by a clip. I unhooked the clip and let the raft fall away into the gulf. I inflated the MK-3C life vest (Mae West) and then discarded my helmet.

I also activated my personal survival radio and could immediately hear some chatter. I heard the Skipper call several times asking if I was OK. I replied each time in the affirmative; however, neither he nor anyone else in the rescue operation could hear

transmissions from my survival radio. Obviously, my transmitter was either inoperative, or was so weak that it could not be heard even in close.

I could hear on the radio that *BUSY BEE 4* had me in sight, and I could see him orbiting me about a mile away and high. For this reason I did not activate the emergency "beeper" (which, if the transmitter was in fact inoperative, would not have worked anyway.) If it had worked, it would have cluttered up the radio making other transmissions almost impossible. They had me in sight so there was no need for it.

Unknown to me at this time, the closest shave in my rescue was rapidly approaching!

THE NEAR MISS

One of the most prominent hazards in a rescue operation of this magnitude (two aircraft down in the same area was quite unusual), is the traffic jam of potential RESCAP aircraft all wanting to help. The two aircraft down were from different carriers, mine from *RANGER* and *CUPCAKE 406* from *CONSTELLATION*. Numerous flights of attack aircraft from both ships were available, and reported on the scene to the rescue coordinator, *CROWN ALPHA*.

All the A4s from *RANGER* (two flights each from my squadron *VA-146*, two flights from our sister squadron *VA-55 (GARFISH)*, two flights from our A1H Skyraider squadron (*ELECTRON*)); and from *CONSTELLATION*, two flights of A4s each from *VA-153 (POWERHOUSE)*, and *VA-155 (SILVER FOX)*. There were doubtless more, but these are all recorded on tape.

Needless to say, with so many aircraft milling about in a relatively small geographic area, with positions and altitudes uncontrolled, the potential for mid-air collisions becomes very high.

I was floating down, fat, dumb, and happy at this point. Things were looking good, I could hear on my survival radio that *FETCH 53*, the rescue helo from *RANGER*, was inbound and estimating arrival in the incident area about the time I would hit the water. *BUSY BEE 4* was doing a superb job of covering me and vectoring *FETCH 53* into the area as the helo seemed to be having trouble determining exactly what heading to take.

It was decided that the *CUPCAKE 406* crew would be recovered first, as they were in greater danger from the beach mortars, plus *BUSY BEE 1* had just reported that there was small boat and junk activity at the mouth of the Song Ca River, indicating that the North Vietnamese were starting an attempt to recover and capture some or all of the survivors (another frightening prospect.) That threat evaporated almost immediately when *BUSY BEE 1* and his wingman made a bombing run on the watercraft at the river mouth. They immediately reversed course heading back up-river and were never again a threat.

At around an estimated 4,000 feet or so in my descent, I spotted two specks on the horizon. I could see a tiny smoke trail behind them and as the seconds passed, their bearing did not change (not a good sign!) As they slowly grew bigger, my eyeballs grew bigger as well. I was boresighted by two A4s (found out later it was *SILVER FOX 513* flying wing on *POWERHOUSE 314*) who apparently did not have me in sight. Descending gently in my chute, there wasn't a thing I could do about it!

SILVER FOX 513 called: "Do you see that chute there Steve?" (normal volume). I floated, mesmerized by the two aircraft boring down on me and growing larger with each passing second. "Steve, do you see that chute at 9 o'clock?" (high

pitched shout). I could see their canopies now as they continued closing, but absolutely noiseless (their jet noise was behind them). As they came very close, I estimate about 500 feet from me, I could see that if they didn't suddenly change course, they would pass without hitting me. Luckily, there was no sudden course change and as they passed at an estimated less than 100 feet, I felt and heard a tremendous explosion of sound which was their jet blast! It was the loudest noise I've ever heard. SILVER FOX 513: "POWER-HOUSE, did you see the chute go by?" (medium volume scream!)

As it turned out, the lead pilot, LT Steve Werlock of VA-153, never did see me although his wingman did, doing everything in his power to avert a potential tragedy. I remember thinking as they approached at high speed, what a hell of a way to go after getting this far!

But luck was certainly on my side that day. As I continued the descent, it became time to make final preparations for entering the water. I knew it wouldn't be long to splashdown, the shoreline had moved up toward the horizon and I was looking across at it instead of down as before. I could also see the shoreline of Hon Mat Island which was known to be fortified by North Vietnamese soldiers, and I hoped that no small boat activity was taking place there. It turned out to be of no consequence.

The surface of the gulf was smooth as glass and it was hard to estimate how near to touchdown I was at this point. In previous survival training we had been warned not to release the parachute from the harness until experiencing a positive water entry. There had been a number of cases reported of pilots releasing their parachute over smooth water surfaces, thinking that they were about to enter the water, when in actuality, they were still several hundred feet or more above the surface. In several cases, severe injuries were the result.

I felt my feet enter the water, and actuated the quick-release fittings as my body slid through the surface. The chute left immediately with no entangling. I was traveling vertically pretty fast, and went well under the surface (I estimate 15-20 feet.) Although the gulf is fairly shallow at this point, I never did hit bottom. I had no problem here, my Mae West had been inflated previously and I'm sure it kept me from going deeper. I popped to the surface immediately.

It is interesting to note here that I never saw BUSY BEE 604 again after I punched out. I guess I was too engrossed in what I was doing at the time. I did see the smoke and debris from the impact on the surface of the gulf at one point during the descent. I was told later that it nosed over after the ejection and, trailing fire all the way, did not explode until impact with the water about two miles seaward from my position.

I was comfortably bobbing in the warm water, observing mortar explosions on the surface at a distance which appeared to be at least 1000 feet toward the shore from me. I think they were just lobbing them out toward my splashdown, but that I was slightly out of their range, thank God! I was worried about the other two survivors though, as I knew they were at a closer range to the beach than I. I also felt bad that I had added to the problems of the rescue already underway when I joined them in the water.

While passing what I estimate to be 10 minutes in the water, I assessed the damages. My right hand was peppered with small bits of shrapnel; however, the gashes on the back of my hand and inside right wrist were fairly clean (probably from the seawater.) I knew there was some metal that got through to the front of my stomach but it felt numb and I hoped that the torso harness and flight suit had taken the brunt of it.

I had more trouble with a long series of gashes along the right side of my neck, which I thought at the time were from flak, but were later determined to have been caused by the parachute risers as they streamed out of the parachute pack and ran out along my neck as I rotated after the ejection.

My main injury concern at this time was my inside right wrist. The gash was long and appeared deep, although I was puzzled that the bleeding was not more severe. The scar is right over the main artery. It turned out that the artery, very fortunately, had not been damaged or I might have had a severe bleeding problem. Nothing I could do now but wait!

I heard the welcome "whup, whup, whup" and turbine whine of FETCH 53 and saw the big helicopter heading my way at low altitude from shoreward. Much to my surprise, there was a fairly brisk wind on the surface and some relatively small waves which I had not observed as I descended. FETCH 53 called and asked me to pop a smoke flare so he could determine an approach direction. I pulled out a smoke marker from my survival vest and tried several times to pull the ring, but it would not budge. I believe now that corrosion may have locked up the "pull-ring".

As I was wrestling with the smoke, the helo commenced his approach, dropping the yellow rescue "horse collar" until it was bouncing off the waves. As he came almost overhead, I discarded the smoke in frustration and prepared to enter the rescue device. No problem, I simply did as practiced many times in the training pool. He maneuvered the helo perfectly, dragging the collar right up to my chest. I grabbed it and put my head and shoulders through, placing the collar under my armpits while turning the collar swivel to the front of my face (by doing this you will remain in the device even if you should pass out while being hoisted.)

Elated, I was in no condition to pass out. As the winch hoisted me up, I must have resembled a drowned rat, but with a grin as big as all outdoors! As the hoist raised me to the open door, the helo was already underway.

A crewman with a matching huge grin extended his hands, helping me to roll in on the helo floor as he assisted in getting me loose from the rescue collar. I felt like a million dollars. I was home free!

My joy was short-lived. As one crewman was getting my gear off and wrapping my right hand in gauze, I noticed the wet figure of the Intruder pilot (LT R. M. Weber of VA-65) up against the forward bulkhead. I had expected to see both survivors once I got aboard, but there was only one and I was disappointed. It was difficult to communicate in the helicopter with the horribly loud and steady engine and transmission whine. The helo crewman shouted to me that the Bombardier/Navigator from the A6 (LT(jg) C. W. Marik) had not yet been located, and that we were heading back to the area of his dye marker for a further search. The crewman checked and dressed my wounds and pronounced me fit to travel (continue the search)!

I suddenly felt that things were not looking rosy as far as finding LT(jg) Marik was concerned. The helo crewman said quietly (out of earshot of LT Weber) that they thought the other survivor had sustained a direct mortar hit. I felt devastated, as I thought that up to that moment the total rescue effort had been going so well.

At this time I looked closer at LT Weber. His face was a mask of dried blood and he looked awful. He appeared to be badly wounded and was very quiet as another crewman worked on him. After removing his helmet they cleaned his face and suddenly, he looked 100% better as it was determined that he had suffered only superficial lacerations around the head. I slid over by him to sort of introduce myself, and amazingly, I recognized him as Dick Weber, an instrument instructor pilot from ATU-213, an advanced flight training unit I had gone through at NAAS Chase Field, Beeville, Texas in early 1958. It was the first time I had seen him in over eight years. He was in a depressed state, confiding to me that he had little hope that his crewman would be found.

We searched the area of the dye marker for another hour before the helicopter fuel status became critical. When the helo pilot reported that our physical state was

stable, RANGER directed us to RED CROWN, a rescue destroyer with a hover refueling capability, and we went into a hover a few feet above the destroyer to refuel.

The destroyer Captain invited both of us survivors into his wardroom while the fueling operation proceeded, where we enjoyed a welcome cup of coffee.

The "tin can" officers and crew were tremendous, treating us like kings. I believe we shook hands with and thanked every crewman aboard for being there for us. Their lot on rescue station is routinely dull, just steaming up and down and around for weeks on end. They were thrilled to do even the unscheduled refueling of the helo, as it gave them all the feeling of helping and being a part of the rescue effort.

We departed the destroyer after a stay of about ten minutes and returned to the original incident scene. The dye markers had faded with near three hours having passed since the first ejection. The search was resumed and we stayed on station for another two hours. All this time we were covered continuously by RESCAP attack aircraft cycled through by the two aircraft carriers. Further search proved fruitless and as fuel again became a factor, we were ordered to return to RANGER.

We were all (helo crew, LT Weber, and I) tremendously disappointed that we hadn't found LT(jg) Marik, but I think we all realized without saying so, that it was pretty much hopeless. Marik was pronounced missing-in-action (MIA), a status carried for several years before a final declaration of killed-in-action (KIA) was made.

RETURN TO RANGER

On the return trip to RANGER, I realized that I could no longer hear anything. The continual whine of the twin-turbine helo engines and transmission noise and totally deafened me (there were no protective ear covers for survivors aboard.) As the helo settled onto RANGER's flight deck I could see many members of my squadron crowding around the craft. We were welcomed back by the Carrier Division Commander, Rear Admiral Mickey Weisner, RANGER C.O. Captain Max Harnish, and my squadron skipper, CDR Schaufelberger. They each shook our hands and warmly welcomed us back, but all I could see was their lips moving, I couldn't hear a word they said!

We were both carried to sick bay on a stretcher as a precaution, totally exhausted. LT Weber was found to be in good shape, and an examination of my wounds revealed nothing critical although it was decided to have me evacuated to Danang Air Base in South Vietnam by CIA COD early the next morning for further medical evaluation, and to debrief with the Air Force SAR Headquarters.

I was also to be made available to the press if my condition permitted which I did with no problems. The incident was over but could never be forgotten!

Four days later on June 29, 1966, the weather finally cleared and the big strike went on the Hanoi/Haiphong POLs, and was a great success. Unfortunately, I was at NAS Cubi Point in the Philippines at the time of the strike, and someone else flew in my place. The Air Force lost only two F-105D aircraft on the Hanoi POLs, and CONSTELLATION's strike on the Do Son POLs along with RANGER's on Haiphong's POLs resulted in heavy damage with no aircraft losses.

After a brief stint at the Clark AFB Medical Facility, I returned to the RANGER which, after completion of the POL strike, had left the line to steam back to Cubi Point. I was placed back in flight status on July 9th. I flew a field carrier landing practice flight (FCLP) on that day with no problems. The RANGER left Cubi Point on

the 11th to return to Yankee Station, and I flew my first combat mission since the incident, on July 13, 1966. I was back in the saddle!

CONCLUSION

Obviously, in my opinion, the rescue was a great success in every way. It was professionally executed, with the full support of the carriers RANGER and CONSTELLATION, the Carrier Division Commander and his staff, the pilots and crewmen of Carrier Air Wings 14 and 15, the U.S. Air Force SAR Coordinator, and a well trained, gutsy rescue helicopter crew.

Some were disappointed in the rescue in that LT(jg) Marik was not recovered. I was also disappointed and saddened at the loss but it was certainly not through any failure of the rescue operation. Snatching two out of three survivors out from under enemy fire was certainly more successful than similar rescue operations up until this time. In fact, had LT(jg) Marik also been saved, it would probably have been the most successful single helicopter rescue action of the Vietnam war.

I was lucky in more ways than one that day. In the Spring of 1966, a field team had been sent from the states to install cockpit armor plating in all A4 combat aircraft. The retrofit of armor consisted of installing four - one inch thick steel plates, two on the cockpit floor extending from the rudder pedals to the bottom of the ejection seat, and two more, one on each side of the cockpit next to the calf of each leg.

In each of the two previous in-port periods at Cubi Point, three of our squadron's 14 aircraft had been fitted with the armor plate, so at the time of the incident, six of our aircraft were armored and eight were not. BUSY BEE 604 was one of those six. I shudder to think of what would have occurred in that cockpit had the armor not been installed!

All's well that ends well!

CALLSIGNS AND ACRONYMS

CALLSIGNS

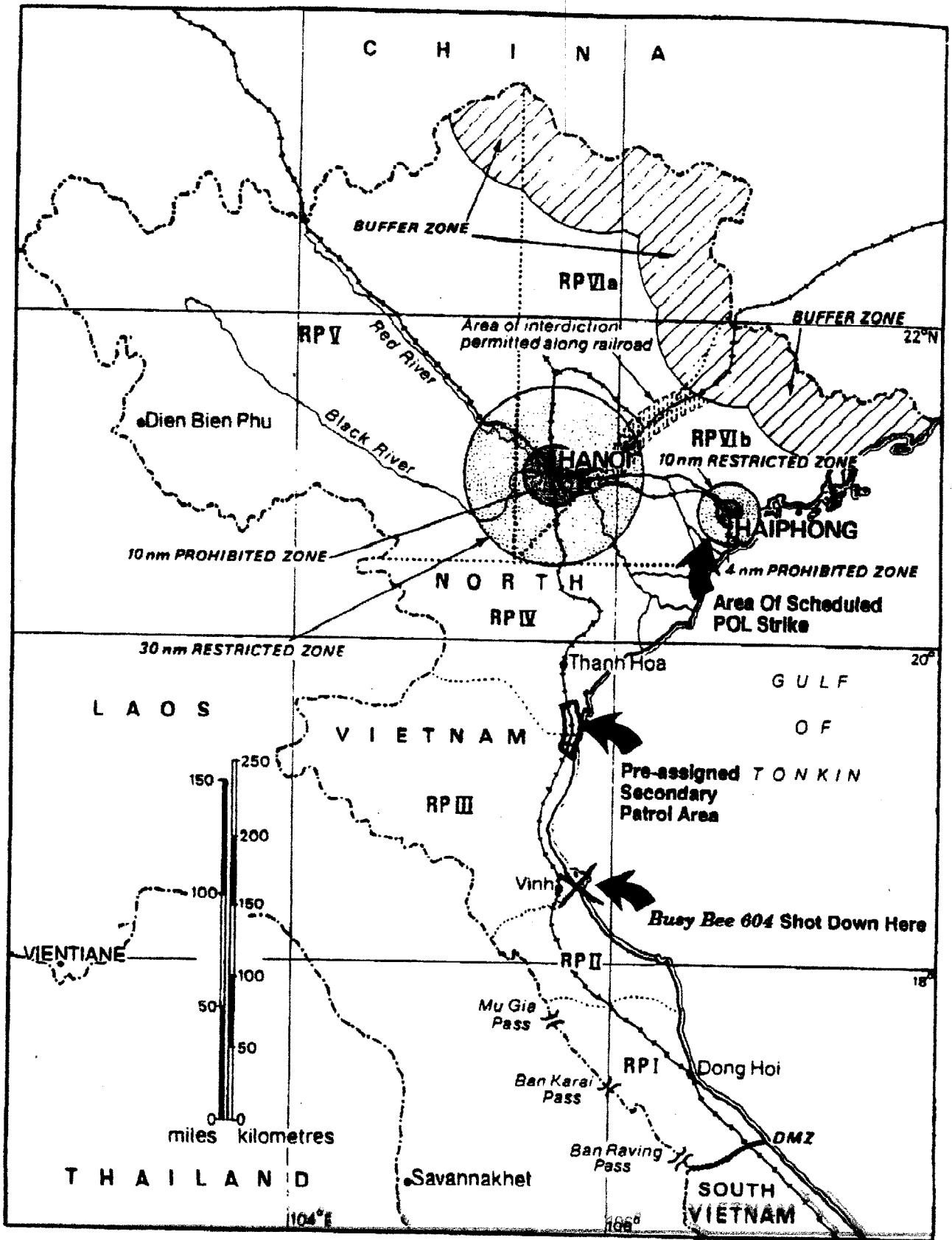
- BUSY BEE** - *VA-146 A4C Skyhawk aircraft (RANGER)*
- GARFISH** - *VA-55 A4E Skyhawk aircraft (RANGER)*
- ELECTRON** - *VA-145 A1E Skyraider aircraft (RANGER)*
- DAKOTA** - *VF-142 F4B Phantom aircraft (RANGER)*
- TAPROOM** - *VF-143 F4B Phantom aircraft (RANGER)*
- FETCH 53** - *SH3A Sea King rescue helicopter (RANGER)*
- OVERPASS** - *VAW-11 E2A Hawkeye early warning aircraft (RANGER)
(this aircraft tape recorded the entire incident)*
- GRAY EAGLE** - *USS RANGER (CVA-61) aircraft carrier*
- CUPCAKE** - *VA-65 A6A Intruder aircraft (CONSTELLATION)*
- POWERHOUSE** - *VA-153 A4C Skyhawk aircraft (CONSTELLATION)*
- SILVER FOX** - *VA-155 A4E Skyhawk aircraft (CONSTELLATION)*
- WAR CHIEF** - *USS CONSTELLATION (CVA-64) aircraft carrier*
- CROWN ALPHA** - *USAF HU-16 Albatross (amphibian) out of the Danang Search and Rescue squadron. This aircraft was the SAR on-scene commander*
- RED CROWN** - *Northern SAR Destroyer. FETCH 53 hover-refueled from this ship during the rescue operation*

ACRONYMS

- RESCAP** - *REScue Combat Air Patrol: The name given to any aircraft charged with protecting and assisting a downed aircrew*
- NVN** - *North Vietnam*
- TIN CAN** - *U.S. Navy Destroyer*

CALLSIGNS AND ACRONYMS (CONT'D)**ACRONYMS**

POL	- <i>Petroleum, Oil, & Lubricants storage</i>
FCLP	- <i>Field Carrier Landing Practice</i>
CVA	- <i>Attack Aircraft Carrier</i>
VA	- <i>Attack Squadron</i>
VF	- <i>Fighter Squadron</i>
VAW	- <i>Airborne Early Warning Squadron</i>



MILITARY BIOGRAPHY

CDR Francis Hugh Magee USN (Ret.)

Born on 5 December, 1934 in Bridgeport, Conn., CDR Magee joined the U.S. Naval Reserve in February 1952 while still attending High School, serving with inactive Naval Reserve Surface Division 3-2 in Stratford, Conn.

After completing High School, CDR Magee joined the Regular Navy in October 1953. Upon completion of boot camp and a one year Electronics Technician "A" School, he was selected for submarine training and graduated from Submarine School in New London, Conn. in February 1955. CDR Magee subsequently served tours in the submarines USS CAVALLA (SSK-244), and USS BARRACUDA (SSK-1), both homeported at the Submarine Base, New London, Conn.

Following a promotion to Electronics Technician 2nd Class (ET2), CDR Magee applied for and entered Flight Training in October 1956 at Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. He completed the jet advanced syllabus at NAAS Chase Field, Beeville, Texas and was commissioned Ensign and designated a Naval Aviator in July 1958.

He served subsequent tours as an A4 Skyhawk strikefighter pilot in Attack Squadrons VA-94, VA-55, and VA-146. Two shore tours as an A4 Combat Flight Instructor Pilot were served in Replacement Training Squadrons VA-125 and VA-44. CDR Magee closed out his 22 year Navy career with tours as the Weapons Officer in USS MIDWAY (CVA-41), and as the Aircraft Maintenance Officer on the Staff, Commander Light Attack Wing Pacific, NAS Lemoore, Calif.

While attached to Attack Squadron 146 homeported at NAS Lemoore, Calif. CDR Magee participated in two combat deployments in USS RANGER (CVA-61), and USS CONSTELLATION (CVA-64), during which time he completed 247 combat strike missions in Vietnam over a two year period. On 25 June, 1966, he was shot down and subsequently rescued in the vicinity of Vinh, North Vietnam, while assisting in the rescue of another downed flight crew.

CDR Magee holds three awards of the Distinguished Flying Cross, 27 Air Medals, five Navy Commendation Medals, two Navy Achievement Medals, and the Purple Heart Medal. In July 1967, he was personally presented with the Vietnamese Gallantry Cross by South Vietnam President Thieu on board CONSTELLATION.

Upon retirement from the Navy in August 1974, CDR Magee entered Fresno State University from which he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1978. He received his Masters degree in Aeronautical Science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in 1989.

CDR Magee presently resides in Mesa, Arizona, and is employed as a Technical Editor at the Garrett General Aviation Services Division of the Allied-Signal Aerospace Company, in Phoenix, Arizona.