

# HC-7 RESCUE 127<sup>(1)</sup> 20-Nov-1972 (Monday)

HH-3A Sikorsky Seaking helo Det 110 Big Mother #60  
USS Jouett (DLG-29) Combat Night <sup>(2)</sup>  
6 miles off North Vietnam coast  
Water: 75° Air: 75° Wind: 30 knots Sea State: 5, 5-7 foot swells

<b>Pilot – LTJG</b>	<b>Timothy P. Dewhirst</b>
<b>Co-pilot – LTJG</b>	<b>Jerry M. Haggerty</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> crew – AMH-3</b>	<b>Matthew (n) Szymanski</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> crew – AT-3</b>	<b>Michael J. Shepherd</b>

Rescue Report; <sup>(2)(3)</sup>

Alert Received - 23:06- Ship's 1MC (23:03 SAR alert station flight quarters – 23:05 Big Mother  
60 airborne and clear of ship <sup>(12)</sup>)  
Vehicle Departed – 23:15 – 15 Miles – Ship had difficulty on fix (pitch black night) <sup>(10)</sup>  
23:16, HH-3A Back up helo launches from USS England, to port <sup>(13)</sup>  
Arrived on Scene – 23:30 – Initial BAD vector  
Located Survivor – 23:31 – Pen Flare - Darkness, IFR, Weather, Rain, Fog  
Begin Retrieval – 23:32 – Helo Hoist  
Ended Retrieval – 23:35 - Helo Hoist  
Survivor Disembarked – 00:15 – USS Truxton (DLG-N-35)  
Total SAR time – this vehicle 1 hours – 00 minutes.

F-4J Phantom 157288 (Bandwagon 210) <sup>(14)</sup> (Club Leaf 201) <sup>(6)</sup>  
(Jolly Rogers) VF-103, USN,  
USS Saratoga (CV-60)

**Lt Cdr Vincent E. Lesh**  
**Ltjg Donald L. Cordes**

When the B-52 strikes had started against targets around Vinh in April it was realized that the huge bombers were vulnerable to interception by MiGs so a strong CAP force of US Air Force and Navy fighters accompanied each raid. On the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> VF-103 was providing the CAP flight for a B-52 strike on Vinh. One of the Phantoms was damaged by a SAM at 17,000 feet about 20 miles northeast of Vinh. The port wing caught fire and the port engine failed. Lt Cdr Lesh and Lt Cordes were fortunate in being able to keep the aircraft flying long enough to reach the sea and ejected safely off Thanh Hoa when the hydraulic system failed. They were picked up unharmed by a Navy HH-3G. <sup>(5)</sup>

20-Nov-72 23:12 Bandwagon 210 reported hit by SAM and on fire. Launched Iron Hand aircraft. Crewmembers of Bandwagon 210 reported down in water after ejecting from aircraft, rescue helo is enroute. 21-Nov-72 (date) (\* late entry – 23:40 Down pilots of Bandwagon 210 recovered by Big Mother 60 and returned to the USS TRUXTON (DLGN-35) <sup>(15)</sup>

23:05 SAR alert, set flight quarters. 23:21 Copyright 11 airborne. 23:35 Big Mother 60 recovered one pilot. 23:42 Big Mother 60 recovered second pilot. Both reported in good condition. <sup>(14)</sup>

## “2 Phantoms Downed, 2 Fliers Rescued” <sup>(16)</sup>

### Clarification: <sup>(3)</sup>

Emergency flight quarters was sounded at 2306 onboard USS JOUETT on the night of November 20th 1972. The helo crew began manning the helo and was briefed that a "MAYDAY" had been given by a plane that was on fire. No accurate position of the troubled aircraft was yet known. The helo launched at 2315 and was given a vector to the scene. The first vector proved to be inaccurate but subsequent vectors led the helo to the scene where upon flares were sighted. The pickups were hampered by the gusting winds and rough seas but the two aviators were rescued within a few minutes. They appeared to be in excellent condition. The rescue flight ended one hour after launch onboard the USS TRUXTON which was forty-five miles from the SAR but had a larger deck for the night landing

Helo's doppler and automatic approach /hover was not working. rough seas-five to seven foot waves. 300 feet ceiling, 1-2 miles visibility, 30 knot winds gusts to 40 knots, no horizon initial vector to the survivors was off by 90°.

Survivors had not turned their strobe lights on which made it more difficult to locate them and then to keep track of them. Some of the survivor's gear (seat pans) was still attached when they came up the hoist and made it more difficult for the crewman to gather everything and everybody back into the helo.

### STATEMENT of pilot - DEWHIRST <sup>(3)</sup>

On the night of 20 November 1972, I had gone to bed 'end was just getting to sleep when emergency flight quarters were sounded. The time was 23:06. My copilot (LTJG HAGGERTY) and I jumped out of the rack and while we were putting our flight suits on I instructed him, to go back to the bird and get engines started while I called CIC to find out what the problem was. LTJG HAGGERTY then left and I called CIC. I was told that they had received a MAYDAY that the plane was feet wet. The evaluator said they were still trying to get a fix on him and that

was about all the information he had for me at the time. He said we should man-up and hold until we got the word to launch. I hung up and proceeded to the flight deck where things were proceeding as rapidly as possible considering the time of night and the inclement weather. Extra tie-down chains and blade boots were being removed by the flight deck crew and there was another member of the flight deck crew up on the bird trying to get the #2 engine door open so he could remove the intake covers. He appeared unfamiliar with the latching mechanism and so I tried to yell at him and explain how to get the door open. Then I thought better of the situation realizing it would be unwise to trust this man's work so I instructed my first crewman, AMH-3 SZYMANSKI, to go finish the job. I then hopped into the bird and began to don my flotation gear. LTJG HAGGERTY was already in the copilot's seat by then but had not yet started the engines. I found out later that he had beat everyone out to the flight deck and was carefully going through the prestart checklist while he waited for other personnel to arrive. Up till that time I had not conveyed any further information concerning the SAR to him and so when he finished his checklist he started to crank #1 engine. I reached up and secured #1 at the same time the LSE was giving us a "cut" sign, and then tried to explain to LTJG HAGGERTY that we were still in a bold status.

No sooner had I finished strapping in than the LSE gave us a turn signal. We proceeded to start #1 and go as rapidly as possible through the checklist. For the launch from the USS JOUETT (DLG-29) the flight deck perimeter lights and the center line lights were on but there were only three or four of these in the port forward corner that were visible from the cockpit. They also had some red floodlights playing on the flight deck from about ten feet up each side of the hanger. These provided some illumination but the greatest illumination of the flight deck came from the white lights inside the hanger. The hanger door was opened about four feet so the white light was coming out low and provided good low intensity lighting for the takeoff. We had our cockpit lights turned up to a greater intensity than would normally be used for night flying because it seemed that this would facilitate the transition to complete instrument flight.

At 23:15 we launched from the JOUETT and after attaining a safe altitude and airspeed I attempted to contact JOUETT on helo common but received no reply. I tried two more times to contact JOUETT and was then told by JOUETT tower that they were still trying to get a controller up to combat. A minute or so after takeoff the controller called me and gave me a vector of 330 at 19 miles to the survivors from CLUB LEAF 210 and that they were in the water eight miles from the beach. Meanwhile we were setting up the weapons and rigging the hoist. My swimmer AT3 SHEPHERD was also getting into his swim gear.

Just about the time we reached the point to which we had been vectored the controller came up and gave us a new vector of 245° for 7 miles. This was a radical change so I double-checked. The vector was confirmed, so we proceeded in that direction. We had been monitoring guard all the time but had heard only an occasional beeper and some transmissions from other aircraft. No voice communication was ever established with either survivor by BM 60.

The weather at the time was extremely poor and hampered us at every point. During the search, we could go no higher than three hundred feet and still see the water. It was completely overcast, ceiling at 300 feet, visibility was one to two miles in light rain and winds were thirty knots gusting to forty. The seas were at sea state five.

After three or four minutes on our new vector, we spotted a flare at our eleven o'clock, about a mile away. I notified the ship that we had spotted a flare as I turned in that direction and

started a slow descent to 150 feet. Soon the flare went out and there was nothing to be seen anymore. We continued in the same direction and started to slow down when I saw simultaneously a pencil flare from the location of the first flare sighting, and another night flare a few hundred yards off the nose. I elected to continue on to the second night flare because we were flying down wind at the time and after turning into the wind I would then be able to pick up one survivor while keeping the general, location of the other in view. I was set up for a right hand approach to the survivor with a final heading of about 050 degrees. The controller had reported the true winds as 050 degrees at 25 knots. The approach was completely manual because our doppler was inoperative but I tried to follow an automatic approach profile. The closer we got to a hover the more I could tell that the winds were not from 050 but rather from our port sides I corrected a little and came to a hover over the survivor heading about 020 degrees, The swimmer went down the hoist and swam to the survivor without detaching himself. The stability of my hover suffered greatly because of the lack of the doppler, gusty winds, and IFS conditions so we had difficulty maintaining a position over the swimmer and survivor. The only real indication of movement in any direction was what I was being told by my first crewman. Eventually SZYMANSKI was able to lift the survivor and swimmer free of the water and bring them to the cargo door. At this time SZYMANSKI quit talking on the ICS and caused some agonizing moments in the cockpit because we, didn't know what was going on. As it turned out he had to use both hands to haul up the lanyard with the seat pan attached and could not key mike. He then cleared us for forward flight.

During our hover over the first survivor, the second survivor discharged a couple more pencil flares as though to remind us of his presence. The flares had come from our two o'clock so when SZYMANSKI cleared us we air taxed the half mile to him. He had seen us headed his direction and had shot a couple more flares as we came. This helped us update his location so well that we taxied directly to him. We corrected our heading into the wind and came to a hover over him heading 350 degrees. The second hover was better because we were headed more into the wind and also because we were getting a little more familiar with the situation and how to correct for it. The second pick up was completed in less time and with less trouble than the first.

When both survivors were aboard they were double checked for injuries and prepared for the flight back to the DLG. We reported both rescuees aboard and requested vectors to the JOUETT. Our controller said that would be a negative and gave us vectors to USS TRUXTUN. That seemed a little strange at the time but we headed that direction anyway. My copilot took control of BM 60 and flew us to the TRUXTUN while I relaxed. LTJG HAGGERTY executed an actual LVA until I acquired the deck visually at which time I completed the approach to an uneventful landing at 00:15.

#### STATEMENT OF co-pilot – HAGGERTY <sup>(3)</sup>

I had been in the rack about half an hour when the JOUETT announced over the 1MC EMERGENCY SAR FLIGHT QUARTERS about 23:04. Both the pilot and myself jumped out of the to get dressed. The pilot told me to go out and start the engines while he called CIC for a brief. I ran out to the helo, got strapped in and was in the middle of starting number one engine when the pilot arrived and told me to cut the engine. He said the plane was still airborne and the ship was trying to get a good position on him. A minute or later, we were given permission to start engines and launch. We lifted at 23:15. After safely airborne, we contacted the ship and were given vectors to the scene where the survivors would be coming down. We asked how

many we were looking for and who was ON-SCENE-COMMANDER. After about ten miles we were given new vectors 90 degrees to port about 9 miles. As we approach this position, we saw a flare to the left of the nose and headed in that direction. We were flying at 300 feet and were IFR in rain. With the aid of a couple more flares from the survivor, we maneuvered into the wind given us by the JOUETT. As we neared the spot where we thought the rescuee was, the pilot turned on our landing lights. As we picked up sight of the downed pilot sitting in his raft we pulled into a hover and the 1<sup>st</sup> crewman talked us directly over the survivor as he lowered our swimmer down the hoist. We were hovering at 50 feet with no visual horizon. We had no visual hover aid in the aircraft since our doppler was inoperative. Also our outside visibility was poor due to the rain coming down. While we were hosting the first survivor aboard, the second shot off a couple pen flares to mark his spot. Once we had our swimmer and the pilot aboard we moved to the second rescue who shot a couple tracers as we neared him. With the aid of our landing lights, the 1st crewman spotted the downed pilot and talked us over him. We lowered our swimmer down the hoist and then both swimmer and survivor aboard. After gaining forward airspeed informed JOUETT that we had two aboard and both in good shape. They, the JOUETT gave us vector to the TRUXTON where we landed.

Survivors reported to the ship's corpsman, they were OK. It was a lot scarier at night but Tim did a great job flying. <sup>(10)</sup>

#### STATEMENT of 1<sup>st</sup> CREWMAN – SZYMANSKI <sup>(3)</sup>

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November at 23:00 hour we were about to turn in for the night when we received the call to emergency flight quarters. We got to the aircraft and made ready for flight but were told to standby, but a few minutes later they told us to turn and launch. As soon as we were airborne, we got the word from the pilots that they had caught fire and were heading feet wet. The second crewman, AT3 SHEPHERD was already getting into his swim gear. We rigged the hoist when we were approximately 8 miles out from the survivors. When we reached the area, I got a good position on the first and guided the pilot to him, I lowered the swimmer down the hoist, and guided the pilot as close to the survivor as possible. The swimmer entered the water and initiated the hook-up. Even though I got a thumb up from the swimmer I didn't lift them up because I couldn't tell whether the survivor had been separated from the raft. Once I could see that they were I brought them under the aircraft and hoisted them up. The 30 to 35 knot head wind and a sea state of 10 to 15 feet made holding a hover very hard, after the swimmer and survivor were in the aircraft I had to break ICS communications to bring in the survivors seat pan. We then proceeded to the second survivor and after getting a location on him by pencil flare made the approach; I lowered the swimmer into the water. The swimmer got off the hoist to make swimming for him easier and lost it when the aircraft drifted to the left, I repositioned the aircraft as close to him as I could but he still had to swim about 20 feet to the hoist. We drifted left again and I tried to reposition the aircraft, but due to conditions, pilot endurance was very limited. I dragged the swimmer and survivor under the aircraft and hoisted them up. After they were in the aircraft and the door was secured, I cleared the pilot for forward flight. I had the survivors remove their flotation gear, and I checked them for injuries. They both were in good shape. I gave them cranial helmets and LPPs (flotation gear) and we proceeded to the

TRUXTON. We landed aboard the ship using a LVA and shut down for the night. The major difficulties encountered were the high head winds and sea state.

STATEMENT of 2<sup>nd</sup> CREWMAN – SHEPHERD <sup>(3)</sup>

The crew of Big Mother 60 was RON aboard the USS JOUETT (DLG-29). About 23:00 I was in my rack asleep after a hard day of flying when emergency flight quarters were sounded. I scrambled up to the aircraft, pulled on my helmet and heard the pilot say over the ICS that we were on hold, an F-4 had been hit and was heading feet wet. A minute later we were given orders to launch, and were airborne in what seemed like seconds. I immediately got into my swimmer's gear then went forward to arm and set up the guns. The pilots briefed us on what was going on and I went aft, got into the horse-collar and double-checked my survival gear. We were over the first survivor in about 10 minutes from takeoff. I was hoist-lowered to the survivor because of poor visibility and sea state of 10-15 foot swells. I entered the water right next to the survivor who was still in his raft, I got him out, hooked us up to the hoist with the snap links and signaled the first crewman. After a momentary hesitation, we were dragged briefly through the water then out and free. I wrapped my legs around the survivor's chest and guided him into the cargo door. Once inside I mentioned to the survivor to remove his inflated LPA-1, checked to see his radio was off, and then had him strap in while I looked him over for injury. He indicated he felt OK. By then we were moving into position over the second survivor, so I again went back and got into the horse-collar for another hoist water entry. I was lowered to within a few feet of the raft. I coaxed the survivor out of the raft and he asked if we could save it. I told him to forget the raft and pulled him clear of it. Then the horse-collar jumped free from my hands and was floating about ten feet away. I swam for it pulling the survivor, once I had it, I told the survivor to hang onto it while I hooked us up. With the all clear signal we were momentarily jerked out of the water, then dragged about 15 yards before we were clear. Again, I wrapped my legs around the survivor and guided him into the aircraft. Then I went forward, sat down and threw-up-sick from swallowing sea water and exhausted from swimming in the rough seas. We then returned to the USS TRUXTON.

"I would like to express my congratulations to you and your son for the rescue of two downed aviators..... The following is an excerpt;

"The VF-103 Sluggers wish to express their sincere appreciation for the truly professional SAR pickup of Clubleaf 210 aircrew on 20 Nov 1972 by Big Mother 60, ably assisted by the USS TRUXTON, JOUETT and GRAY". <sup>(6)</sup>

- 1) Numbering as per HC-7 Rescue Log (accumulative rescue number)
- 2) HC-7 Rescue Log
- 3) HC-7 Det 110 Rescue report
- 4) Map – Google Earth
- 5) "Vietnam - Air Losses" By: Chris Hobson (with permission)
- 6) Unclassified Accident Report – B-3-72
- 7) Letter – dated 26-Jan-73, addressed to Michael Shepherd's parents from HC-7 CO McCracken

- 8) Loss aircraft location data provided by: W. Howard Plunkett (LtCol USAF, retired)
- 10) HC-7 History collection; Ron Milam - Historian
- 12) USS Jouett – Deck Log
- 13) USS England – Deck Log
- 14) USS Truxton – Deck Log
- 15) USS Saratoga – Deck Log
- 16) Pacific Stars and Stripes – 11-23-1972

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