

HC-7 RESCUE 43 (1) 19-June-1968 (Wednesday)

UH-2A 149764 Kaman Seasprite helo Clementine 2 Det 104
USS Preble (DLG-15) Combat Night (2) **INLAND 7 Miles**
USS Jouett (DLG-29)

Water: NA Air: NA Wind: 0 knots at scene – High overcast night and no moon, densely vegetated hill surrounded by rice paddies and a village.

Pilot – LTJG Clyde E. Lassen
Co-pilot - LTJG Clarence “Leroy” Cook
1st crew – AE-2 Bruce B. Dallas
2nd crew – ADJ-3 Donald West

Alert received - 0012: UHF GUARD
Vehicle departed – 0022: 70 miles
Arrived on scene – 0141: Brief visual
Located survivor - 0153: RESCAP, Pistol Flares
Begin retrieval - 0155: Pistol Flares
Ended retrieval – 0225: Survivors experienced difficulty reaching helo
Survivor disembarked – 0250: Survivors taken directly to USS Jouett for medical aid

F-4J 155546 “Root Beer 210” VF-33 (Tarsiers) USN,
USS America (CVA-66)

LT Cdr John W. Holtzclaw “Claw”
LT Cdr John A. Burns “Zeke”

As night fell, a pair of Phantoms started an armed reconnaissance mission with an A-6C Intruder looking for trucks on the roads north of Vinh. The aircraft received a SAM warning and Lt Cdr Holtzclaw jinked to evade two missiles but his aircraft was hit by a third SA-2 at an altitude of 2,600 feet. The Phantom’s starboard wing was blown off and both crew ejected near the village of Van Tap, 20 miles northwest of Vinh. This was the first aircraft lost to a SAM in almost four months. The two airmen landed in rice paddies between two villages and made their way slowly to a densely forested hillside to hide and hopefully await rescue. A Seasprite flown by Lt Clyde E. Lassen with Ltjg C. Leroy Cook, AE2 Bruce B. Dallas and ADJ3 Donald West of Detachment 104 of HC-7 based on the destroyer USS Preble. Lassen made a daring flight into North Vietnam in total darkness over unfamiliar terrain. The helicopter was shot at by ground fire including two SAMs but eventually Lassen located the burning wreckage of the Phantom. Lt Lassen landed in a rice paddy about 600 feet from the downed airmen but had to lift off

again when enemy troops opened fire at the helicopter as it sat on the ground. A flight of Navy aircraft arrived and started to drop flares so Lt Lassen attempted to pick up the survivors from among tall trees in the forest. As the rescue sling was being lowered the flares went out and the helicopter hit a tree in the pitch dark. Despite damage to the helicopter Lt Lassen made several passes over the downed airmen so that his door gunner could fire at enemy troops approaching the survivors' position. Eventually Holtzclaw and Burns made it down the hill to the flat rice paddies and Lt Lassen made another landing but the airmen were too far away and the helicopter again came under fire so Lassen took off, circled and landed, for the third time, closer to the survivors. Another SAM was fired as the helicopter was about to touch down and enemy troops could be heard crashing through the jungle trying to reach the survivors before they could get to the helicopter. For three minutes, the helicopter sat in the rice paddy while Holtzclaw and Burns struggled their way through the mud and vegetation to reach the Seasprite. Under fire from three sides, Lassen took off as soon as the men were aboard after a total of 56 minutes over North Vietnam and 45 minutes under fire. The helicopter was fired on by AAA as it crossed the coast and the side door was torn off during evasive maneuvers. Short of fuel and his helicopter badly damaged, Lt Lassen headed for the nearest ship and landed on the destroyer USS Jouett with only five minutes of fuel remaining. For his outstanding efforts to complete the rescue, one of the few successful night rescues of the war, Lt Lassen was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor at the White House on 16 January 1969. ⁽⁵⁾



Cook – Lassen – Dallas - West



Pilot LCDR John Holtzclaw Phantom II After rescue June 19, 1968 (#43)
Aboard USS Jouett DLG-29 Photo By: Bain FTM2

Contributed By: Bruce Dallas

"Claw" Roother 210



Radar Intercept Officer LCDR John Burns Phantom II After rescue June 19, 1968
Aboard USS Jouett DLG-29 Photo By: Bain FTM2

Contributed By: Bruce Dallas

"Zeke" Roother 210

Difficulties:

1. Received hostile fire throughout search and rescue
2. Darkness and unknown terrain
3. Survivors were on a hill surrounded by tall trees and dense vegetation
4. Unable to converse with survivors while their PRC-63 was on beeper
5. Unable to detect strobe light due to vegetation

Remarks:

1. Magnesium 38 caliber tracers proved to be excellent means of location survivors in dense jungle
2. Pilots should be instructed, to only transmit when requested
3. For any night land rescue, RESCAP should carry an abundant supply of illumination flares

(Rescue Report) GENERAL;

The support from RESCAP in vectoring us to the survivors, steering us around the flack and SAM sites, dropping flares right on target each time, and the morale support they gave us in just showing they were there was a definite contributing factor which made the rescue a success.

We were feet dry for 58 minutes, for approximately 50 minutes we were receiving heavy but inaccurate small arms and automatic weapons fire. I contribute our stroke of good luck at not being hit to the overcast dark night. We were flying without lights and did not give our position away by random firing. I believe the VC were firing at the sound of the helo but could not see our position. I do not believe this rescue could have been performed during the daylight because of the populated area in which the survivors landed and the heavy concentration of small arms in the area.

The training we received at HELSUPPRON SEVEN, the specialized combat air crew pilot training at Cubi, the team work of each individual and the hours spent in night proficiency training prior to deploying made the rescue a comparatively smooth operation.

STATEMENT OF LTJG C.E. LASSEN, PILOT OF CLEMENTINE TWO

On 19 June, I was the pilot of Clem TWO with LTJG Cook co-pilot, AE2 Dallas and ADJ3 West as aircrewmembers. We were operating from South SAR aboard USS PREBLE.

At 0012 SAR alert was sounded, the halo was manned and we prepared to launch. We received information that an F-4 had been shot down by a SAM and the survivors position was about 60 miles from USS PREBLE, a half south of the 19th parallel and 20 miles inland.

We launched at 0022, were given a vector and handed off to USS JOUETT for control. We were instructed to intercept the 260 degree radial at 10 miles from JOUETT and enter holding. Shortly thereafter we were told that RESCAP had radio communications with the two survivors and a night overland rescue attempt was recommended. We were given a vector of 260 and altitude of 5000 for crossing the beach and we headed in.

We went feet dry and switched to UHF GUARD. After receiving several vectors around SAM and FLACK sites we spotted the flames from the wreckage. I commenced a high speed spiraling descent, leveled off at 1000' and began a circling search of the area. With voice communications with the survivors and vectors from RESCAP we were able to find the survivors location without too much difficulty. The survivors stated that their strobe light was on and they could hear us directly overhead. We could occasionally catch glimpses of the strobe light but never long enough to pinpoint the position. We asked the survivors to fire a pistol flare, they did and we spotted their position.

The survivors were about half way up a rather steep, heavily wooded hill with numerous tall trees around their location. While waiting for RESCAP to light their position with flares, visual contact with the survivors was lost and again we requested and again we received a pistol flare

from the survivors. We informed the survivors that we had sighted their position and we would land near them approximately 200 ft. directly downhill from their position. I made an approach and landed in a rice paddy. As soon as we were on the ground, we began receiving small arms and some automatic weapons fire. The survivors stated they could not get down the hill so I lifted and made a couple of orbits overhead.

The survivors kept saying "Come Get Us, Come Get Us !", we could not get the survivors to turn off their radios and consequently they could not hear us while they' were transmitting. We told them we would try to pick them up from their position.

With the survivors, crewman and co-pilot giving me directions I made a partial instrument partial contact approach to about 100-200 feet over the survivors. The area at this time became well lighted by flares dropped by RESCAP. The survivors position was between two large trees. I made the approach to a 50' hover between the trees, which were approximately 150 feet apart. As the crewman was lowering the rescue sling the overhead illuminating flares went out, it became pitch dark again, lost sight of the survivors and had no visual reference. The crewman yelled that we were going to hit a tree. I added power and was just starting a climb when I hit the tree just aft of the 1st crewman's positions. I felt a large jolt; the helo pitched down and went into a tight starboard turn. I regained control and waved off. We informed RESCAP that we had struck a tree and had a fairly heavy vibration. We requested more flares and were told that there were no more available but some were on the way. I again informed the survivors they would have to come down off the hill and into the clearing.

We had been receiving snail arms fire since arriving in the area. The fire became progressively worse as we waited. At this time, we were under heavy small arms fire and occasionally automatic weapons fire. I thought of calling in RESCAP for fire suppression but the fire was scattered from all directions and not concentrated in any one area. The area in which we were orbiting was composed of rice paddies, a village, and a wide one lane road. The five to ten minutes we were without illumination was spent returning, hostile fire and trying to keep the survivors position in sight.

RESCAP arrived with additional flares and began dropping them right in the spot we requested. While circling we tried to persuade the survivors to come down off the hill, we finally got good two way communications, and, the survivors said they were coming down. I made another approach and a second landing. After landing the survivors said we were too far away from their position so again I launched.

At this time we were down to 30 minutes fuel, we had been in the immediate area of the survivors for 45 minutes, and we were now under heavy fire. My crewmen were returning the fire from both sides of the helo. The co-pilot was also firing from his window. The survivors said they were at the bottom of the hill and could hear people moving in around them and we had better hurry. I commenced another approach, when passing their 180 position at approximately 2000 ft, a ball of flame about six inches in diameter passed a few feet under the helo at a high speed. As we rolled on final, automatic weapons fire opened up from a position just a few hundred yards south of the survivors' position. When at approximately 50 feet the flare overhead went out and I had to turn on the spot-light to land. We came under heavy fire the

minute the light was turned on. We touched down in a marshy area and I had to hold the collective up to keep the helo from sinking into the water and mud. During the two minutes, it took the survivors to reach the helo we were under continuous fire. The crewman and co-pilot did an excellent job in suppressing the fire long enough for the survivors to reach the helo. After both survivors were aboard we departed, climbed to 4000' at 140 knots and headed toward the sea. One of the survivors radios was still on and it was over riding my UHF so that I couldn't receive transmissions from RESCAP. As we neared the coast, we started receiving flack and heavy caliber automatic fire from the coastal defense sights. It was bursting on our same altitude so we entered a descent. The starboard door would not completely close and was torn from the helo and lost. I kept the air speed at 150 knots until we were feet wet. We landed aboard the-JOUETT at approximately 0240 with 135 lbs of fuel remaining.

STATEMENT of AE2 BRUCE B. DALLAS AIRCREWMAN OF CLEM TWO

On June 18 1968, at approximately 2400, HC-7 DET 104, had a SAR alert aboard the USS PREBLE (DLG-15) stationed on the South SAR station. In a short time we were in the air and heading for the SAR area. The pilot was LTJG LASSEN, the co-pilot LTJG COOK, crewman DON WEST ADJ3, and myself, BRUCE DALLAS AE2. We were pre-positioned off the coast for a short time while aircraft went in the area to find the wreckage of the downed plane and make contact with the Survivors. When this had been accomplished we were sent in on the SAR. We found the area without much difficulty and proceeded to look for the downed pilots. Just before we went down from the altitude of 5000 feet, I saw a fairly large ball of flame go by the right side of the aircraft. I can't judge how close it missed us or what it was because of the darkness and because was concentrating on trying to find a signal from the Survivors.

We spotted the flashing light after searching a while and headed for the area and asked for flares to be dropped by RESCAP. The Survivors strobe light could only be seen from certain angles. They fired their 38 caliber flares, which marked the spot exactly. They were about half-way up a heavily wooded hill. After making a few passes over them, we informed them they would have to come down the hill to the clear area of the rice fields where we could get to them. Then we proceeded to find a place close as possible to land and wait in the rice paddies. All this time we were under scattered small arms fire, which grew heavier as the time went on. While we were landed and waiting one Survivor called over his radio that they were unable to reach us, so we took off on the second attempt to reach them. We saw their flasher in a group of trees and went in for a hoist pick up. (The pick-up could not have been attempted without the light of the flares being dropped overhead.) We were just a short ways away from the pilots and dangerously close to the trees. I was starting to let out the hoist when the flares went out and we were in sheer darkness with trees all around us. I started retracting the hoist as fast as possible and in the process the helo hit a tree on the right side. In my leaning out, I was also hit on the face as the tree went by. As soon as the limb hit me, I yelled "Get Up, Get Up" and we were out of there and climbing. Nothing but skill and experience on our pilot's part saved us from crashing.

We then circled the area a few more times and informed the Survivors that it was imperative they get to a clear area. On those words they started down the hill. We then made a few more passes firing at the flashes coming up at us from all around the area. We made a second approach to land in the rice fields. Having just touched the ground, I saw the Survivors were closer but too far away to wait because of the small arms and automatic weapon fire which had increased and because the downed pilots did not think they could make it to us at that time. We took off again, circled the area, and made our last approach to land in a water-filled rice paddy.

The landing was more of a hover than a landing, for although the landing gear was down and on the ground, the weight of the aircraft had to be held off because of the soft ground. It took the Survivors about three minutes to reach us. While making the last approach we were under fire from behind us and from both sides. We were returning the fire during landing and takeoff and I silenced one position that I know of.

On our return trip, closing the door for max speed, the right door flew off due to damage from hitting the tree. When we reached the coastline we were under heavy fire from the right by flak and from the left by automatic weapon fire, but we all made it to the USS JOUETT unharmed. One of the Survivors had a hurt leg but I don't know how badly.

STATEMENT OF ADJ3 DON WEST, AIRCREWMAN IN CLEMENTINE TWO

On June 19, 1968, flight quarters are given at approximately 2400. I ran to the helo and in a few minutes, we were airborne.

We circled for a while off shore for USS JOUETT to give us the go ahead to proceed inland. As soon as we reached the beach automatic weapons fire was evident. We proceeded to the location of the survivors, which was not far from the crash site, descended to about two to three hundred feet for possible visual contact. Dallas, the other aircrewman, sighted a strobe light flashing and we marked the position of the survivors to be on a hill to our right. The hill was covered with trees and heavy brush. We radioed to them to try to get into a clear area for pickup. The overhead flares went out and we circled a few more times until flares were dropped by RESCAP.

During the waiting period for the flares I noticed automatic and small arms fire. I fired my M-60 at the point had spotted the fire coming from. Flares were dropped again by RESCAP and we descended even lower. We were going to try to hoist them up by the rescue sling. We hovered for what seemed to be a few minutes, the flares went out and I noticed we were drifting. Before I could say anything we hit a tree, I yelled "Get-Up" we cleaned and radioed for more flares. If not for the skill and quick thinking of our pilot, I hate to think what might have happened.

We circled once more. Fire from automatic weapons was increasing. We set down in a clearing about a hundred to two hundred feet from the survivors' position. The survivors were trying to get closer to us but heavy brush was hampering their movements. The overhead flares went out again so we lifted off and circled again. This time small arms and automatic fire was becoming intense. As I visually kept contact with the ground fire and the survivors' position, I noticed a

large fire ball coming from behind and passing beneath the helo. I was firing at the heaviest concentrations of ground fire.

We landed once again, noticed the strobe light getting closer and closer. I yelled "Their Coming, Their Coming". The flares went out and we lifted again. This time hostile fire was getting closer and closer. The flares lit up and we proceeded down for our pickup. We landed and spotted the pilots running toward the helo. Once they were inside, I noticed flashes from gunfire coming from the direction the survivors had left. I yelled "Let's Get Out of Here", and at the same time began returning the fire with my M-60 as we lifted off and headed for the coast. I spotted very heavy concentrations of automatic and small arms fire along our route. I was continuously firing until we reached the coastline and the ocean.

We flew to USS JOUETT and landed.

SUMMARY OF ACTION ATTACHMENT (additional data inserted as noted)

At approximately, 0012H, 19 June 1968, USS PREBLE (DLG-15), CTE 77.0.1.2 (South SAR Station Element) with HC -7 DET 104 embarked, received information that an F-4J from USS AMERICA (CVA-66) had been hit by a North Vietnamese Surface-to-Air missile and was down at a point approximately 60 miles from PREBLE and 20 miles inland from the North Vietnamese coast. CTU 77.0.1 (COMDESRON ONE), the SAR Commander, directed the DET 104 UH-2 (CLEMENTINE 2) be launched and passed to control of USS JOUETT (DLG-29), the SAR ship nearest the scene. 0013 the helo detail is stationed. Proceeding to SAR sight, USS Preble changes from a northerly course at 10 knots to a westerly course at 22 knots ⁽¹²⁾

LTJG LASSEN, his co-pilot LTJG COOK, and combat rescue aircrewmembers AE2 DALLAS and ADJ3 WEST departed PREBLE at 0022H and proceeded to a holding position off the coast while aircraft on the scene attempted to locate and gain voice communications with the downed aviators. 0030 USS America logs the crash of their F-4J 18-56 105-29 ⁽¹¹⁾. At 0115H RESCAP reported establishing voice communications with the two survivors and a night overland rescue was recommended by the On Scene Commander (VA-56 Side Number 405). The SAR Commander concurred, assigned RESCAP, and vectored CLEMENTINE TWO to the site. LTJG LASSEN received the vector and proceeded inland to the site in company with 3 RESCAP aircraft, crossing the coast at 0132H as LTJG COOK located the described position on the map and briefed him on the topography and known AAA positions. When in the vicinity, LTJG LASSEN began a circling search of the area. The sky was overcast and visibility for detection was extremely limited due to lack of moonlight or other natural illumination. With the aid of vectors from RESCAP, directions from the survivors, and an occasional glimpse of the survivors' strobe light and pistol flares the survivors' position was established at 18-59N 105-30E, about half way up a rather steep, heavily wooded hill with numerous tall trees around their location. (several jutting karst hills surrounded by rice paddies (11)) At this time, the helo crew observed small arms fire was being directed at CLEMENTINE TWO.

At 0158 LTJG LASSEN informed the survivors he would land at the bottom of the hill, approximately 200 feet from their position. He touched down in a rice paddy and held the helo in a partial hover to avoid sinking into the mud. As the small arms fire grew more intense and was joined by automatic weapons fire, LTJG COOK, AE2 DALLAS and ADJ3 WEST commenced returning the fire. However, the survivors reported they were unable to reach the helo through the heavy undergrowth and LTJG LASSEN took off to attempt a hoist pick-up among the trees. A RESCAP aircraft carrying flares moved in over the area and illuminated the survivors' location. LTJG LASSEN commenced an approach while LTJG COOK monitored the air speed, rate of descent and altitude. A hover was established between two large trees and AE2 DALLAS commenced lowering the rescue hoist as LTJG COOK and ADJ3 WEST resumed firing their weapons to suppress the hostile fire that continued to intensify. At this instant the last of the overhead flares went out. With the loss of this illumination, LTJG LASSEN suffered momentary night - blindness. As both enlisted crewmen warned that they were going to hit a tree, LTJG LASSEN felt a sharp jolt and the helo pitched nose down and went into a tight starboard turn. He instinctively righted his aircraft and climbed clear of the area. Upon requesting additional flares, he was informed that there were no more flares available in aircraft in the area at that time. However, the SAR Commander was in the process of requesting additional aircraft and quickly vectored those available with flares to the scene. LTJG LASSEN then informed the survivors that they would have to come down the hill. Despite the intensifying hostile fire, his low fuel reserve, and the vibration of his damaged helo, LTJG LASSEN determined to attempt another pick-up. While waiting for another aircraft carrying flares to arrive, LTJG LASSEN maneuvered to keep the survivors position in sight while LTJG COOK, AE2 DALLAS and ADJ3 WEST continued to suppress the hostile small arms and automatic weapons fire which was by then coming from all sides of the helo, preventing any effective use of the RESCAP for hostile fire suppression. After approximately five (5) minutes of maneuvering the helo in the rescue area in the midst of sustained hostile fire while encouraging the survivors to come to the clear area, additional RESCAP aircraft arrived with more flares and the survivors informed LTJG LASSEN they were coming down the hill. He again landed in the rice paddy, but they informed him he was too far away. LTJG LASSEN launched again. At this time, CLEMENTINE TWO had fuel for only thirty (30) minutes of flight and the hostile fire was continuing to increase in volume and accuracy. Nevertheless, LTJG LASSEN determined to make a final rescue attempt. While gaining altitude to commence the next approach, a ball of fire, possibly a surface-to-air missile, passed just beneath the helo. As he descended for the landing, automatic weapons fire commenced from a direction behind the survivors. When CLEMENTINE TWO had descended to an altitude of about fifty (50) feet, the flare overhead went out, again plunging the rescue scene in complete darkness. Despite the danger inherent in disclosing his position to the enemy, LTJG LASSEN turned on his landing lights and completed the landing, once again holding the helo in a hover to avoid sinking in the mud. LTJG COOK, AE2 DALLAS and ADJ3 WEST continued to suppress hostile fire during the two or three minutes it took the survivors to reach the helo. At least one position was silenced by helo gunfire. At 0225H, (hollering for a steer ⁽⁶⁾)(120° ⁽⁶⁾) with the survivors on board, LTJG LASSEN launched to return to JOUETT. Small arms fire encountered all along the route and AAA bursts were observed at the helo's initial altitude as they approached the coast put point. During a high-speed descent to avoid these bursts, the door previously damaged in the collision with the tree was torn from the helo. LTJG LASSEN continued toward the sea and at 0250H after fifty-eight (58) minutes overland, during forty (40) minutes of which CLEMENTINE TWO was receiving hostile fire, the helo reached safety. Over the water, CLEMENTINE TWO was subsequently recovered aboard USS JOUETT with fuel sufficient for only five (5) minutes of flight remaining.

7 Miles **INLAND** – 18 Miles north of Vinh, North Vietnam

0307 USS Preble recovers Big Mother Helo 74 on deck ⁽¹²⁾

0811 USS Preble returns to South SAR station ⁽¹²⁾

0925 LCDR Holtzclaw and LCDR Burns returned aboard via helo. ⁽¹¹⁾

HC-7 Rescue 43 -- View from Above

FROM: Kenneth J DAVIS, Jr., Commander, US Navy (Ret),
SUBJ: CDR Clyde E LASSEN, USN (Ret)
(HC-7 rescue 43 June 19, 1968, note added by Ron Milam)

Ref (a) NANews Oct/Sep'98, "Into the Night"

1. I have just read reference (a). I am aware of then -LTJG Lassen's activities over the beach on 19 June 1968; know the contents of his Medal of Honor Citation; and have read the comments left at reference (b) and attributed to Captain John Holtzclaw, USN (Ret). I thought that you all might be interested in another perspective.

2. Taking these three points in order:

a. On 19 June 1968, LT Roger Brodt and I were assigned to Attack Squadron 85 onboard USS AMERICA. We were tasked to conduct an armed reconnaissance mission accompanied by a section of F-4Js from VF-33. The lead F-4J was manned by LCDR John ("Claw") Holtzclaw and LCDR John ("Zeke") Bums; I regret that I cannot recall the names of their wingman. The mission concept was based on the A-6A INTRUDER's ability to identify moving targets on the ground with our AMTI doppler radar; while we stayed low (AMTI worked best at an altitude of 2500-3000' AGL), the F-4J section would stay high (12-14,000') and in trail using their air-to-air radar to maintain position on us. The intent was that we would locate the targets, flare them, and get out of the way while the F-4Js delivered their ordnance via a dive delivery. Once the F-4Js had expended all their ordnance, they would go feet wet while we continued on our way to locate additional targets on which we could expend our ordnance. I do not recall our exact load, but we had Mk-82s and flares aboard ... probably 16 of the former and a half-dozen canisters of the latter. We were flying noon-to-midnight, and this was the last launch of AMERICA's day, so launch would have been at 2230 with feet dry occurring shortly before 2300.

The target area consisted of a road network which formed a fairly even triangle. The southern point was the city of Vinh, thence northwards along Highway 1 to approximately 19 degrees north, thence westward to Vinh Son (where the NVA had an anti-aircraft school), thence southeastward back to Vinh.

We hadn't been over the beach long before we picked a convoy of 6 to 8 trucks. As we commenced our flare run, we received both AAA (port and port-bow) and a SAM warning (starboard side). Shortly thereafter, we received missile launch alerts and visually sighted at least four missiles in the air - two coming at us and two going high, presumably for the F4s. Roger elected to continue the flare run to release, which we did, and to then commence evasive maneuvers, which were successful. I did observe at least one SAM explosion high, but quite frankly wasn't paying too much attention to the plight of the F-4s.

Shortly thereafter we observed a healthy explosion on the ground in the vicinity of the target, and Roger called "Good hits!" to the Phantoms. A few moments later the F-4 wingman called his lead without success - we then realized that the explosion had been the lead F-4J impacting the ground. Given that we had not jettisoned our ordnance while evading the SAMs, and that the F-4J wingman really wasn't much use in a night SAR situation, we elected to remain on-scene while the second F-4 went feet wet,

We were advised that some A-7As would be arriving for SAR CAP, and that we were to remain overhead until their arrival. At this point we had neither radio nor visual contact with Claw and Zeke, but we did know where the aircraft impacted -- we had a good, tight DIANE system and good radar fixes on several distinctive ground features.

While awaiting the A-7s, we made repeated low passes in the area where we thought the downed crew must be located, an area characterized by several jutting karst hills surrounded by rice paddies. Although we took intermittent AAA fire and were locked up by FANSONG radars, there were no more SAM launches. When the A-7s arrived on-scene, four of them, we went feet-wet to refuel from a KA-3, then returned to the scene. The A-7s were flaring along one side of the karst hills and attempting to discourage the AAA sites. We took up a higher station, orbiting at about 7-8,000' AGL.

From that attitude we had an advantage ... we could see the other side of the hills, and that's where we sighted a strobe light. After some back-and-forth with the A-7s, it was agreed that the A-7s would go high and we would go low over the strobe light area and turn on our nav-lights and rotating beacon when we reckoned we were directly overhead Claw and Burns. We did that, the A-7s got a visual, and shortly thereafter voice contact was made,

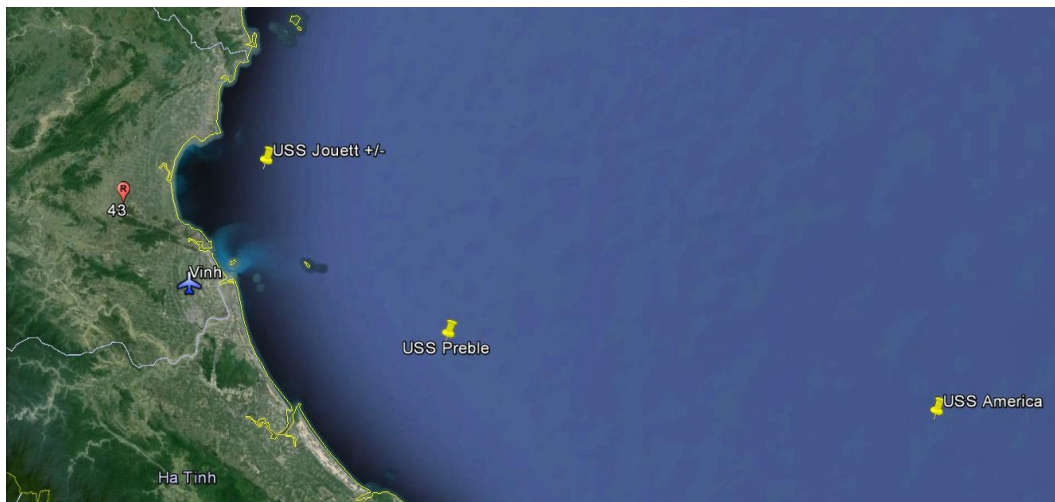
Claw and Burns advised that troops were coming up the hillsides from the rice paddies and asked that they be discouraged. The A-7s had expended most of their ordnance (the A-7As usually launched with only 6 or 8 Mk-82s due to engine thrust limitations), so we used ours -- all of it, including the bomb racks themselves. Didn't discourage the NVA entirely, but it did provide a breathing space.

By this time, the helo was holding just east, AMERICA was hollering for us to come home so they could shut down ops, and we were out of ordnance and getting shy on gas. We stayed long enough to see the helo break off its first two attempts, including the tree strike. As we departed the helo drivers were grumping about tree damage, ground fire, the downed crew's inability to get down the hill, the lack of flares (the A-7s were about out), and their determination to make another attempt.

We were well en route to AMERICA before we got word through Strike Control that the third attempt had been successful and that the helo had made it back to the North SAR.

b. Commander Lassen's Citation doesn't tell the half of it. The A-7s were out of ordnance and down to their last flares, while the NVA were well on the way to establishing an effective flak trap. I still admire the courage and determination

demonstrated by that helo crew; no-one would have faulted them for a minute had they packed their bag and left after the tree strike. Lassen was equipped like the proverbial brass monkey, and his crew weren't far behind. He deserved the Medal. I understand that his co-pilot received the Navy Cross, and he deserved that as well. Don't know what the aircrewmembers received, but on my list they were (at the least) up for all they could drink. (note: Dallas and West received Silver Stars)



- 1) Numbering as per HC-7 Rescue Log (accumulative rescue number)
- 2) HC-7 1968 Command Report
- 3) HC-7 Det 104 Rescue report – none on file
- 4) Map – Goggle Earth
- 5) "Vietnam - Air Losses" By: Chris Hobson (with permission)
- 6) CIC audio tape of rescue (within collection) – provided by: Bruce Dallas
- 7) Kenneth J Davis CDR USN (retired) – overhead commander VA-85 (email 3-15-2001)
- 8) Loss aircraft location data provided by: W. Howard Plunkett (LtCol USAF, retired)
- 10) HC-7 History collection; Ron Milam – Historian
- 11) USS America (CVA-66) – deck logs
- 12) USS Preble (DLG-15) – deck logs
- 13) USS Jouett (DLG-23) – deck logs, not available – map position estimated

- A. - USS LASSEN – (DDG-82) Const – 9-8-1997, Keel – 8-24-1998, Christening 11-6-1999
- B. - UH-2A 149764 fuel starvation flight - helo ditched and sunk 2-3-1968
- C.- Cook – email (3-20-2006) – “Yes, at the direction of Clyde, I dumped fuel to improve hover capabilities, my claim to fame is I turned off the fuel dump switch, in time to save enough fuel so we had 15 minutes of flight time.”
- D. - The HC-7 Historical collection has several published stories and a screenplay of Rescue 43.

Additional References:

- i. “Leave No Man Behind” by: George Galdorisi and Tom Phillips
- ii. ALL HANDS – April 1969 – “The Midnight Ride of Lt Clyde Lassen”
- iii. Pacific Stars & Stripes – June 26, 1968 – “ After 2 Hairy Hours, F4 Crew Rescued”

- iv. USS Preble (DLG-15) “Plan-of-Day”
- v. Kaman Rotor Tips – Aug-Sept-Oct 1968
- vi. Kaman Rotor Tips – March-April 1969
- vii. Kaman Rotor Tips – November-December 1970
- viii. Atsugi “Skywriter” Jan. 17, 1969 – “Medal of Honor to Atsugi Pilot”
- ix. Naval Aviation Times – February 1970 – Medal of Honor
- x. Approach – April 1969 – “Rugged Rescue”
- xi. ALL HANDS – August 1972, January 1974,
- xii. Naval Aviation Times – September-October 1998 – “Into the Night”
- xiii. Afterburner – Friday, January 31, 1969 – “Medal of Honor to HC-7 Pilot for Rescue of Downed Airmen”
- xiv. Centennial of Naval Aviation – Winter 2011 – Vol 3, Issue 1 – “Valor in the Dark”
- xv. Air and Space – Smithsonian – April/May 2013 – “Rescued”
- xvi. Chopper by: Robert F. Dorr –chapter 10 – “Night Mission into North Vietnam”

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