

HC-7 Attempt RESCUE 30-Dec-1971 (Thursday)

SH-3A Sikorsky Seaking helo Det 110 Big Mother 64
USS Chicago (CG-11) Combat Day
1.6 miles off North Vietnam coast – 1000' off island

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Pilot – LT | Franklin A. Pinegar |
| Co-pilot - LTJG | Ralph W. Fairbanks |
| 1st crew – AN | Herbert C. Curry |
| 2nd crew – AN | Michael R. Plamondon |

A-6A Intruder 155677 (Boomer, NG-506) ⁽⁶⁾ Boomers VA-165, USN,
USS Constellation (CVA-64)

Lt Cdr Frederick Lee Holmes (KIA) (Wall – Panel 02W-Row 092)

Lt C.W. Burton (survived) see HC-7 rescue 81

Shortly after the Phantom was shot down, the Navy lost another aircraft during a Proud Deep strike on Yen Dung near Vinh. A formation of Intruders, Corsairs and Phantoms from the Constellation crossed the coast eight miles north of Vinh at 12,000 feet en route to the target. Because cloud covered the target area it was planned for an Intruder to lead the other aircraft to the target as a pathfinder and locate the target by radar. The Intruder would drop its bombs in straight and level flight above the clouds, as would the accompanying Corsairs and Phantoms. Unfortunately, this tactic put aircraft at great risk from SAMs and radar-directed AAA. Lt Cdr Holmes was approaching the target when a SAM shot up through the cloud layer 6,000 feet below the aircraft and exploded just in front of it. The aircraft became engulfed in flames and the starboard wing separated. The NFO, Lt Burton, and possibly the pilot were ejected unintentionally by the breakup of the aircraft. Lt Burton survived, albeit badly injured and was rescued by a Navy helicopter from the sea near Hon Nieu Island off the coast near Vinh. Enemy boats were kept at bay by the Corsairs and Phantoms, which made several strafing runs near the survivor. However, although one of the SAR crew reported seeing another man in the water there was no sign of Lt Cdr Holmes who probably did not survive the ejection. Due to the presence of a large number of small boats in the area, the SAR helicopter could not stay long to investigate. ⁽⁵⁾

Mike (Frenchy) Plamondon 4-25/26-2010 (portion of interview)

HC-7 Nov 69 to Aug 74 ADJ-3 Aircrewman Atsugi, Cubi, and IB
PUC, Unit Citation, Air Medal, Bronze star, (was downgraded from Silver Star)

Bronze Star – **ATTEMPT** off of NVN, on North SAR, a pilot of an A-6 and BN were shot down by a SAM, went in to get the pilot, VC shooting 3” shells in area from the coast, hitting close. 10-10 dropped out, swimmer. Couldn't find pilot, but found the LOX bottle and brought it back. Dove into the cockpit, no pilot. Second helo picked up the BN. High speed hook-up, behind helo. Mike (Frenchy) Plamondon 4-29-2011 (phone interview) & email notes from Ralph Fairbanks 4-25-2011

Being on deck for about an hour, the Big Mother 64 crew had little time to relax. 1000 hours on December 30, 1971 the SAR alarm sounds. Big Mother 64, aboard south SAR station USS Chicago (CG-11) sharing the deck with HC-7 Detachment 104 (Clementine). Big Mother 64, Pilot LT Frank Pinegar, Co-pilot LTJG Ralph Fairbanks, first crewman AN Herb Curry (Rice), second crewman (swimmer) AN Mike Plamondon (Frenchy), receive instructions to the location of the troubled aircraft. While the rescue efforts are being coordinated, RESCAP is trying to locate the downed pilot and navigator (BN). Big Mother 63, launches from the aircraft carrier USS Constellation to assist. Both helos positioned, feet wet for confirmation of location. Closing on the reported site, between Hon Nieu and Hon Mat islands, three miles from the main land, BM 63 observes many junks near shore and sights a chute, drifting to the water, awaits for the pilot (BN) to land and deploy the swimmer. BM 64 is first sent to area of possible life rafts, but was a coral reef. Continuing another third of a mile to search for the second pilot, locating a debris field. Items seen in the water resemble a helmet, BM pilot Pinegar, speeds to the site, swimmer Frenchy is prepared and sitting in the cargo door, first crewman Rice holds his hand on Frenchy's shoulder. They don't want any false tap outs. As the helo flares in a 10/10 Rice taps Frenchy three times on the shoulder and away he jumps. As he leaves the helo he hears a sound as if the helo transmission is coming apart, big boom. Entering the water, Frenchy finds some debris, and the noise he had heard. BOOM, an explosion a few yards away, the column of water rises like a power pole, three wide and a 120 feet tall. The water is not clear, all mud from the bottom.

Scared to death, Frenchy tries to make himself as small as possible in the water. The helo crew jinks out to sea, to provide a diversionary target for the enemy artillery crew. Keeping his head down, Frenchy dives below the surface, and spots the wreckage of the plane, an A-6 Intruder (direct hit by SAM). BOOM, another blast from the shore artillery, it is getting closer. He takes a deep breath and dives 25 feet down to the plane, looks into the cockpit, and finds no one. Returning to the surface, he observes more shelling. "Come on BM 64, get me out of here." Looking skyward, there were so many USA jets, that the sky was darkened. "Get those guns." Approximately 600 yards away, the huge cave gun on the island continues to bracket the rescue site. The first attempt to pick up Frenchy, "We came back into a hover to pick him up, we heard a loud bang that sounded like a transmission problem. Looking out my left window we saw a large plume of water and we knew right away it wasn't the transmission", (Ralph) Holding onto a found LOX bottle (liquid oxygen), Rice throws the hoist cable. Frenchy, he grabs the horse collar. "We hurriedly left our position and Frenchy fell out of the horse collar." (Ralph). On the second approach, the helo is chased away by the ever heavy accurate shelling. "We came back into another hover and while picking him up another splash off our starboard side. As we departed, we saw another one right where we had been hovering. They were evidently bracketing us. What we'll do for our comrades!" (Ralph) we needed to get even lower to the water to avoid the shelling. "Please, BM come back." This is getting very serious, reaching for his flares, he tries to ignite one. It didn't work, it is one of the leftovers, with tapped ends. Pulled on the igniter ring and it fell off. Probable a good thing it didn't light, he was in a pool of JP-5 fuel and hydraulic fluid. The charming third time, BM 64 arrives, hovering 20 feet above, first crewman Rice throws the cable across Frenchy's left shoulder. No time to find the hook, it is sinking, hooked directly to the cable with his clamp. Not even a second later, the helo is rising, the cable is racing upward. Got him, **BUG OUT!** Pilots push the nose down, within a few seconds helo is doing 120 knots and Frenchy's fins

are about to touch the horizontal stabilizer bar on the tail rotor. "Come on Rice - REEL - me in.!" "Man, the hoist cable is flat out the back of the helo." Sitting in the helo the stress and anxiety smacks Frenchy, he cries then laughs repeatedly. Smoking one after another a pack and half of Winston Red cigarettes didn't last long. I "relieved myself three times, water washed away any stains in my trunks." A good thing they couldn't see me in the water.

Back on the carrier, after the debriefing, Admiral Cooper informed Frenchy that there were several high speed boats headed to his area. Admiral Cooper offered a shot of bourbon. A SEADEVIL never refused a drink. As fellow Seadevils rotated on and off of DET 110, Frenchy was deployed for another 3 months on HC-7 DET 110.

"Well Done's" from Admirals Cooper and Ferris.

Several weeks passed, Frenchy feeling ill checks into Sick Bay. The underwater explosions and the resulting concussions had perforated his intestines, caused a hernia and internal bleeding. Surgery followed. Not enough proof for Purple Heart.

(Partial re-typed from email copy of originals provided by Ralph Fairbanks)

Z 300136Z DEC 71
CONFIDENTIAL
COMUSMACV PASS TO JPRC
SAR INCIDENT

1. OLD NICK TWO HIT AT 290853H. TWO GOOD PARACHUTES OBSERVED BEEPER AND VOICE TRANSMISSION HEARD " I AM ALL RIGHT, COMING DOWN IN A DAMN COMMUNITY" HEARD ON GUARD. BEEPER COORDINATES 18-46N 105-54.2 FROM NTDS, COORDINATES DO NOT CONCUR WITH FEET DRY, BENGAL 300 AND 301 ON SCENE. OSC DOES NOT HAVE EXACT LOCATION ON CHUTES, BIG MOTHER 63 CLOSING AREA BUT WILL REMAIN FEET WET UNTIL FURTHER DETAILS AVAILABLE. BIG MOTHER 64 LAUNCHED AND ON STATION 18-58N / 105-57E. BIG MOTHER 63 REPORTS SIGHTING MANY JUNKS NEAR BEACH.

Z 300220Z DEC 71
SAR AMPLIFYING
SITREP (NO.) ONE
PAGE TWO RUNGPRA4433

1. SAR INCIDENT (ACFT HIT BY GROUND FIRE) TIME 0053Z DATE 30 DEC. 71
2. OLD NICK TWO (F-4B)
3. LAST KNOWN POSITION 18-47N, 105-42E DETERMINED BY TACAN
4. TWO WAY COMMUNICATIONS ARE NOT AVAILABLE WITH DISTRESSED CRAFT.
5. FREQUENCIES BEING GUARDED BY SEARCH UNITS 243.0, 364.2
6. SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION FROM FLIGHT OR OPERATION PLAN (INCLUDING CRUISING SPEED, ALTERNATE DESTINATION, AND ANY DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS - FOR AIRCRAFT) RETURNING FROM STRIKE MISSION OVER VINH.
7. TIME OF PUNCH OUT 0100Z
8. NUMBER OF PERSONNEL INVOLVED TWO (LOCATION OF PASSENGER LIST). GOOD CHUTES OBSERVED.
9. AIDS TO DETECTION BEING CARRIED BY PERSONNEL IN DISTRESS ARE UNKNOWN.
10. ACTION BEING TAKEN BY THIS COMMAND TWO SH-3 SAR HELOS AIRBORNE. REMAINING FEET WET. BENGAL 310 HAS TANKED AND REMAINS ON STATION WINTIL APPROX. 1005, BEEFEATER A-7 SUPPORT ACFT DEPARTING STATION AT 0953H.
11. WEATHER IN SEARCH AREA OVERCAST WITH 1500 FOOT CEILING
12. ASSISTANCE REQUIRED NONE
13. AKING TWO FOUR OFFERED ASSISTANCE BUT WAS NOT NEEDED AT TIME.

PAGE THREE RUNGPRA4433

B. TWO CHUTES WERE REPORTED DESCENDING THROUGH CEILING AT 0100Z.
C. FOL TRANSMISSIONS WERE HEARD ON MILITARY AIR DISTRESS (243.0MHZ)
0055Z - "OK I'M ALL RIGHT"

I'LL KEEP MY EYES ON YOU. YOUR KEEP YOUR EYES ON ME."
0058 - COMING DOWN IN A DAMN COMMUNITY"
0100Z - BEEPER LAST HEARD

D. TWO POSSIBLE LIFE RAFTS REPORTED AT 18-48N, 105-46E BY ALFA WHISKEY ABOUT 0140Z, THIS POSITION WAS INVESTIGATED BY BIG MOTHER 64 AND ALL THAT WAS SEEN WAS CORAL.
14. SAR HELOS HAVE SEARCHED WATER AREA BETWEEN HON MAI AND HON NIEU ISLANDS TO WITHIN THREE MILES OF LAND AREAS. AW HAS TEMPORARILY TERMINATED SAR EFFORT AT 10006 Z.

Z 300228 Z DEC 71
CONFIDENTIAL

SAR INCIDENT

1. POSITION 18-48N, 105-52E BETWEEN HON MAT AND HON NIEU.
2. SOURCE OF ALERT-MAYDAY ON M.A.D. (243.0) TIME 0206Z BEEPER AND VOICE HEARD
3. IDENT - BUSY-BEE 306
4. BIG MOTHER 63 HAS BOTH PILOTS IN SIGHT, MAKING PICKUP ON SCENE COMMANDER BEEFEATER 605

CONFIDENTIAL

SAR AMPLIFYING REPORT SITREP ONE
300228Z DEC 71

1. MAYDAY HEARD 0206Z
2. IDENTITY - BOOMER 506 (INCORRECTLY REPORTED. S BUSY BEE 306 IN REF A).
3. POSITION - BETWEEN HON NIEU AND HON MAT ISLANDS
4. NO COMMUNICATIONS WITH DOWN PERSONNEL
5. FREQS GUARDED - 243.0 AND 364.2
6. RETURNING FROM STRIKE MISSION OVER YEN DUNG
7. TIME OF PUNCH OUT - 0210Z
8. TWO PERSONS
9. AIDS TO DETECTION CARRIED UNKNOWN
10. BIG MOTHER 63 AND 64 SENT TO AREA. BM 63 RECOVERED RIO, BM 64 INVESTIGATING HARD MATERIAL IN WATER AND PLACED SWIMMER IN WATER, RCVD GROUND FIRE FROM ISLAND, FIRE SUPPRESSED BY BEEFEATER 314 AND 305 AND BUSY BEE 306. SWIMMER RECOVERED BY BM 64. HELOS RETURNING TO RED CROWN. RIO REQUIRES MED ASSIST NCE FROM DR ON BD RED CROWN.
11. OVERCAST
12. NO ASSISTANCE REQUIRED.

UNCLASSIFIED

1. FOR CREW OF BIG MOTHER 64 WELL DONE. FERRIS

CONFIDENTIAL

SAR INCIDENT TERMINATION

A. MY 300228Z DEC 71

B. MY 300308Z DEC 71

1. (C) WITH CONCURRENCE OF CTG. 77.0 HAVE TERMINATED SAR EFFORTS FOR BOOMER 506 PILOT AT 290425Z.
2. (C) DEBRIEF OF BIG MOTHER 63 PILOTS REVEAL B/N REPORTED MIS ACFT TOOK DIRECT HIT FROM SAM. PILOT NEVER SEEN BY B/N. INITIAL REPORTS OF TWO CHUTES / PERSONNEL SIGHTED PROBABLE ERRONEOUS. BOTH BIG MOTHER 63 AND 64 COVERED DEBRIS IN THE AREA THOROUGHLY AND RECOVERED UNDEPLOYED LIFE RAFT. CONSIDERABLE SAMPAN ACTIVITY NOTED THROUGHOUT AREA. BIG MOTHER 63 IN AREA FOR SAR ON ANOTHER ACFT SPOTTED B/N BEFORE HE HIT THE WATER AND RECOVERED HIM ABOUT FIVE MINUTES LATER. RESCAP REPEATEDLY ATTACKED COASTAL DEFENSE SITE ON HON NIEU ISLAND AFTER RESCUE HELOS DREW HEAVY FIRE. SEVERAL DIRECT HITS AND SECONDARY EXPLOSIONS NOTED ON SITE.
3. (C) CONDITION OF RESCUED B/N GOOD WITH PROGNOSIS FOR RECOVERY EXCELLENT.
4. IN VEIW THOROUGHNESS OF COVERAGE OF WATER AREA VICINITY RECOVERED B/N AND NUMBER OF SMALL CRAFT IN AREA CONSIDER POSSIBILITY OF PILOT REMAINING UNCOVERED IN WATER REMOTE.
5. (C) BOLDNESS AND PROFESSIONALISM OF RESCAP AND SAR HELOS CONSIDERED OUTSTANDING.

CONFIDENTIAL

SAR INCIDENT (U)

1. WE FOLLOWED WITH GREAT INTEREST AND ADMIRATION THE SUCCESSFUL RESCUE OF LT BURTON. THE BN OF BOOMER 506, FROM ENEMY WATERS ON 30 DEC, AFTER HIS AIRCRAFT WAS DOWNED BY AN ENEMY MISSILE IN THE VICINITY OF VINH, NVN, THE QUICK DECISIVE ACTION TAKEN BY THE AIRCREWS OF BIG MOTHER 63 AND 64, AND ESPECIALLY THE HEROIC EFFORTS OF THE CREWMAN WHO ENTERED THE WATER UNDER ENEMY FIRE TO RENDER ASSISTANCE TO THE INJURED AIRMAN CONTRIBUTE DIRECTLY TO THE SAVING OF LT BURTON'S LIFE.

2. ALSO THE AGGRESSIVE AND PROFESSIONAL ACTION TAKEN BY THE PILOTS.

CONFIDENTIAL (PAGE TWO)

OF BEEFEATER 305 AND 314 AND BUSY BEE 306 IN MAKING REPEATED ATTACKS AND SILENCING THE ENEMY COASTAL DEFENSES THAT WERE JEOPARDIZING THE SAR EFFORT WAS SINGULARLY OUTSTANDING.

3. FOR THEIR BOLD AND COURAGEOUS ACTIONS, ALL DIRECT PARTICIPANTS IN THIS SUCCESSFUL SAR EFFORT ARE HIGHLY COMMENDED AND OFFICIAL RECOGNITION IS CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE. COOPER.

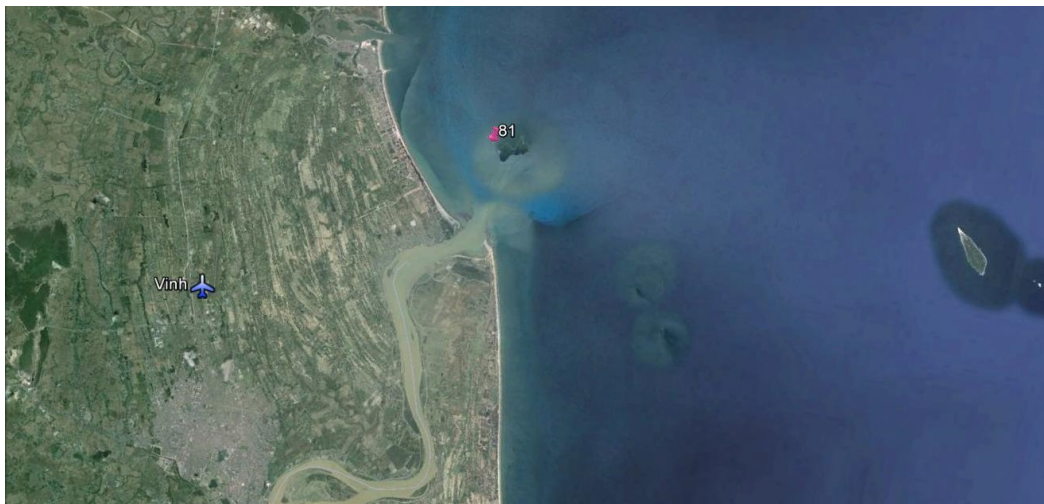
010210Z JAN 72

UNCLASSIFIED

AWARD RECOMMENDATIONS

CIF 77 310242Z DEC 71

1. ORIG PREPARED TO MAKE AWARD RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTIONS DESCRIBED REF A. IF AFFIRMATIVE, WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR VIEWS AS TO APPROPRIATE AWARDS FOR AVIATION PERSONNEL INVOLVED. IN ADDITION TO PILOTS AND AIR CREWS INTEND INITIATE RECOMMENDATION FOR COMMENDATION OF FOX AIR CONTROL PERSONNEL INVOLVED.





**AN Mike (Frenchy) Plamondon
HC-7 Combat Aircrewman 1972**

- 1) Numbering as per HC-7 Rescue Log (accumulative rescue number)
- 4) Map – Google Earth
- 5) "Vietnam - Air Losses" By: Chris Hobson (with permission)
- 9) Loss aircraft location data provided by: W. Howard Plunkett (LtCol USAF, retired)
- 10) HC-7 History collection; Ron Milam - Historian
- 12) USS Constellation – Deck Logs
- 13) USS Denver – Deck Log

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

USAF RESCUE LOG

30 Dec 1971 (ZULU) (local +8 hours)

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 30/0057 BOOMER 506 | Navy acft down, Beeper – VINH area |
| 30/0111 BOOMER 506 | Navy acft down, NAVY working SAR |
| 30/0230 BOOMER 506 | down – 2 POB – NAVY working SAR (NAVY A-6) |
| 30/0320 BOOMER 506 | frm Queen – R/O or Pilot on board – helmet in wate. Navy may have given up on second man. The second man listed in the 02302 entry was the PJ. (swimmer) |
| 30/0830 BOOMER 506 | NAVLO advised us SAR on BOOMER 506 terminated |