

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
336th ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY (UH-1)
13th COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION
(DELTA BATTALION)

3 December 1967

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report

Detachment 10
38th Air Rescue Squadron
APO US Forces 96320

On 25 November 1967, an Air Force FAC was shot down and crash landed at Nam Can outpost in a heavily wooded area 30 miles south of Ca Mau. A heavy fire team of the 336th Assault Helicopter Company was scrambled to the area. Low ceilings in the vicinity of the downed aircraft forced the "T-Bird" helicopters to fly at an altitude of 1200'. Upon reaching the area a radio call was received from "David 30", an Air Force FAC which was orbiting the area. The pilot of "David 30" informed "T-Bird Chief" that at the present time the outpost where the aircraft had gone down in was under intense mortar fire from the Viet Cong positions. "David 30" further stated that an area south of the outpost across the river contained numerous automatic weapons positions, including three .50 caliber machine guns as well as mortar positions. "David 30" advised "T-Bird Chief" that Air Force fighters had been requested and suggested that the gunships remain at altitude until an airstrike could be conducted on the enemy positions. He further stated that any attempt to extract the downed crewmen at this time would probably result in further loss of aircraft and personnel. "T-Bird Chief" called to check on the estimated time of arrival of the fighter aircraft and was informed they would arrive in approximately forty minutes, however the gunships had only thirty minutes of fuel remaining. During this time mortar rounds were continuing to hammer the outpost and it was evident to all concerned the presence of the downed crewmen at the outpost was merely provoking the Viet Cong into intensifying its attack. That plus the fact that no radio contact could be made with the downed crewmen caused great concern from all the aircrews who feared they were possibly severely injured, or would be if the mortaring continued at the present pace. "T-Bird Two" checked his flight for available smoke pots and verified that all crews involved were willing to attempt an extremely hazardous extraction. "T-Bird Chief" then informed "David 30" that he was sure he could place smoke pots between the enemy positions and the outpost if the rescue aircraft in the area would be willing to attempt the pick-up. "David 30" had contact with the rescue helicopter, "Pedro 91", from Detachment 10, 38th Air Rescue Squadron. The "T-Bird's" did not have radio contact with "Pedro 91" and it was necessary for "David 30" to coordinate tactics for the extraction. The FAC also had visual contact with the enemy positions and this was instrumental in directing the gunships into the area to place out the smoke pots at the most advantageous positions. To prevent any doubt as to the location of the enemy positions "David 30" made a low pass over them and put out a smoke grenade and showed the hostile positions in order to direct the "T-Birds" into the area as well as the rescue aircraft. Once the enemy positions were located by the "T-Bird" aircraft "T-Bird Chief" dropped down low level north of the outpost with "T-Bird Two" providing fire support while the smoke pots were put out. The "T-Bird" aircraft proceeded at an altitude of ten feet above the river and parallel the enemy positions. "T-Bird Chief" dropped two twenty minute smoke pots out while "T-Bird Two" led the fire team between the lead ship and the enemy positions in order to place suppressive fire onto them. The "T-Bird" aircraft then proceeded at low level north of the outpost and conducted a thorough recon of the area over which "Pedro 91" would have to fly going into the outpost. "David 30" relayed the landing instructions to "Pedro 91" and reconfirmed that the rescue aircraft felt that the smoke would provide adequate concealment and that they felt the situation warranted an immediate attempt of the extraction. "David 30" received an affirmative reply and "Pedro 91" set up an

approach into the outpost with the "T-Bird" gunships as an escort. The "T-Birds" suppressed the enemy positions with rocket and machine gun fire, establishing a circular orbit over the rescue helicopter and flying parallel to the enemy positions to place more effective fire onto them. Remaining at an altitude of one hundred feet the gunships drew enemy fire to themselves and away from the rescue helicopter. The suppressive fire provided by the "T-Birds" pinned down the enemy and was the primary factor in preventing the rescue ship from being accurately engaged by the numerous enemy automatic weapons positions. The first attempt at pick-up failed because the downed crew had gone to a bunker when the mortar attack began because they did not consider a rescue attempt possible. On the second attempt "Pedro 91" picked up one crewman and then again came under intense mortar fire. The pilot of the rescue helicopter aborted the pick-up at that time before effective fire could be placed on his aircraft. Relaying through "David 30", "Pedro 91" radioed that he would again attempt a pick-up to extract the second crew member, again consideration was to get the crew member out without further injuries and to remove the American personnel against whom the Viet Cong were directing their mortar attack. It was felt by all that the continued mortar attacks were in an effort to kill the Americans and keep the rescue ship out of the area. If a successful extraction could be made quickly it was thought that the mortar attack would cease or at least diminish in volume, thus, suffer fewer casualties. Each time as the rescue aircraft descended into the outpost the "T-Bird" gunships provided escort and accurate heavy suppressive fire. The fire support provided by the "T-Birds" was effective and undoubtedly caused both casualties and spread confusion in the enemy positions. During the second and third pick-up attempts the Viet Cong shifted some of its mortar fire from the outpost and was now firing on the attack path used by the "T-Birds", many rounds were observed falling into the river in close proximity to the gunships. One "T-Bird" aircraft received damage due to bursting mortar rounds. Once the second crewman was aboard "Pedro 91" the "T-Birds" escorted him to altitude and back to Ca Mau. During the entire extraction "David 30" remained below the cloud layer to direct the gunships and the rescue helicopter. While doing so he pin pointed at least two mortar positions. "David 30" remained over the area to mark the enemy positions for the fighter aircraft which resulted in destroying them and preventing further attacks on the defenseless outpost.

In the execution of this rescue under continual automatic weapons, small arms fire and mortar fire the teamwork was all that could possibly be attained. The judgement, planning, coordination and performance of duty by the crews involved in this action is worthy of the highest praise and should be duly recognized. It should be noted that the mission could not have been performed had it not been for the coordination and radio relay provided by "David 30" his marking of the enemy positions and directing the complete rescue. The gallantry, mission orientation and complete disregard of their own personal safety of "Pedro 91" was also vital. The gallantry shown by the "T-Birds" and the devastating suppressive fire and screening was the prime factor in keeping the enemy from placing accurate fire on the rescue aircraft. Had the crews of any of these aircraft delayed their decisions to make the pick-up and not shown such tremendous (something missing here) rate would most certainly have been much greater. I strongly recommend that all crews involved in this rescue mission be awarded the Silver Star for their actions under such adverse and overwhelming conditions.

This action was clearly an example of coordinated action of US Army and US Air Force aircraft working together, improvising as they went along to perform a heroic rescue deep within Viet Cong territory in an area heavily defended by a Battalion of front-line main force troops. It showed the courage, drive and dedication of American military aviators in the highest tradition of our American heritage.

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