

BLACK WIDOW HISTORY I CORPS 1968

Late August or early September 1968 we were flying (ass and trash) in support of the 1/501st Battalion, West of LZ Sally in the mountains. We had been hauling everything imaginable to the units of the 501st. Some of the items that we carried to the field units were their mail (pony express), resupply of ammunition, food, explosives, and medical supplies. Normally the first resupply trip of each day consisted of the pony express and ammunition.

About noon as we landed at LZ Sally's log pad, the Battalion S1 (Personnel Officer) ran out to the pad all excited about one of his enlisted soldiers that had missed his PCS (permanent change of station). He explained this young soldier was supposed to be back in the real world (USA). The young soldier's family had called their congressman wanting to know why their son had not come home when he was supposed to. Any time a congressman's office calls about the well being of a soldier that lives in his congressional district the Army jumps through hoops to fix the problem.

The S1 instructed us to drop everything we were doing, get our asses, which included the helicopter, back to the jungle, pick up this young soldier and deliver him to the Bn S1 without delay. I informed the Bn S1 that his instructions were all well and good but it would be helpful if he could give me the location, call sign, and radio frequency the unit was working on. Bn S1's face got so red that I thought he was about to have a heart attack. The thought of some 1LT questioning his instructions was beyond his comprehension. When he finally settled down and realized that without that information I would not be able to find the unit.

Once the S1 gave us enough information so that we could locate the unit and rescue of the missing soldier we departed LZ Sally. As we flew in the general direction of the unit we made radio contact with the company commander and informed him of the situation. He was more than happy to cooperate with us, but informed us that there was no landing zone (LZ) available at his location. He was currently located on the side of a mountain with 200-foot high trees. Based on his map and our air recon we could not locate a LZ anywhere near his location. To send his man down the mountain by himself was suicidal, and he could not send enough soldiers to make the pick-up relatively secure, without jeopardizing his units fighting ability.

After much discussion, it was decided to put the soldier in the top of a tree so we could pick him up from there. We informed the company commander that we would keep one radio on his frequency while we continued to support the rest of the battalion. When we landed back at the log pad, the Bn S1 was waiting for his soldier. When no one got off the helicopter and we started to load up for the next trip he really jumped on my shit. He didn't have the curtesy to ask why I did

not pick up his soldier. If the idiot had looked at his map and had known what he was looking at, he would have realized that we might encounter some difficulties making a pick-up. If he had listened to our radio conversations he would have been informed on what was happening. After a lengthy explanation, he excepted the situation and the fact that he had no control of what was happening or when it would be completed. We continued to log the balance of the battalion waiting for a call from C/501st.

It was almost two hours before we received the radio call from C/501st indicating they were ready for our unusual pick-up. From the time we received the call, until we arrived on station took approximately 20 minutes. As we approached the C Company's location we broke radio silence, was informed that our young man was standing at the top of the tree. He was secured to the tree with pistol belts because we didn't want our rotor wash to knock him out of the tree. Our rotor wash generated about 60 MPH of wind speed as we pulled up to a 200-foot hover. As we inched our way toward the soldier, we had to be careful not to hit him with the rotor blades. When we were close enough my crew chief, (Mike Willie), reached out of the aircraft and grabbed the soldier's trousers so he could let the pistol belts fall to the ground, then physically pulled him into the aircraft. We found out later that the unit had used det-cord to blow off the tree branches near the top so we had a clear and safe approach for pick-up.

When we arrived at the log pad the Bn S1 was waiting. This young soldier would be on an aircraft back to the real world flying out of Da Nang before the end of the day.

Just another example of what pilots and aircrews did just to get the job done. I am sure there are thousands of stories out there just like this one. We need everyone's help if we are to preserve Black Widow and Spider history.