

from the desk of James L. Kever

George Leduc

Dear George:

I found out a bit more at the reunion and have revised my recollection about 28 April 1989. You already know about the failure to recover the remains of Dick Reardon, who was KIA that day.

That's coming up 20 years ago and I still feel, smell and taste it every day. I can't see their faces anymore, but all of the rest of it is pretty darned vivid.

We were training a new gunner that morning, so when we took off from Moc Hoa to go back to the YRBM for showers, logbooks, crew change and a couple of hot meals, we decided to find something on the ground to shoot at and let the gunners burn up a barrel or two.

Dick was flying the lead as Fire Team Leader, with Hal Castle as copilot, Mike Schafernocker left door and George Page right door. I was the copilot in the trail ship, with Joe Hart as HAC, ADJ1 Lloyd Williams right door and an AN Charles Larsen left door and AN Wiley student gunner.

Someone spotted some sampans abandoned along a dry watercourse (this was near the end of the dry season) and we flew over them, then made a firing run from East to West. I think that we even fired some rockets at them. They were just junk, but they were all alone in a sea of grass and nothing.

As we finished that first firing run, we flew over a thin tree line. Lead called that he was receiving heavy ground fire, then declared an emergency, then called a flameout. He turned right, away from the trees to the middle of an area with trees on two sides. We were climbing frantically and calling for help as we watched him autorotate, but guess what? We were now the center of attention of the guys on the ground and in less time than it takes to tell, we were all red lights and rotor rpm warning signals, too. Dick flared too much, stuck the tail boom in the dirt and flopped down like a sandbag. The ship turned into a ball of

flame and black smoke and about that time Joe Hart landed us about 50-75 yards away with hardly a bump. He chose a run on landing instead of a full flare. We had discussed the pros and cons pretty intensely and he remembered and saved a few lives right there.

We rolled out of the aircraft and took stock. The right door had a bullet in his ass and was cussing his luck, but still dragging an M-60. ADJ1 Williams said he was sure that someone was moving at the other aircraft as we landed, so he charged over there to see if anyone had been thrown clear and was still alive. Mind you, we were not alone at all, as there were plenty of people willing to kill us for disturbing their morning. The ship was taking so many hits, that it sounded like a summer hail storm in progress! Williams picked up the only survivor, George Page, and ran back toward us with him in his arms.

Outlaw 29, a slick flying swingship for the area, was on the ground at Moc Hoa when all the fun started. He heard the MAYDAY and cranked up and headed our way. Warrant Officer Dennis Iannozzo was the AC. He arrived in the area, established radio contact and told us to get ready to climb in quickly. (I should mention that I was using a newly issued PRC-90. I am eternally grateful for transistors and Army Warrant Officers, in about equal measure.) Dennis says that he never heard me, but one of the Black Ponies was overhead or nearby and we had some sort of communications link.

He landed between the aircraft and picked up Page and Williams, then lifted and headed out.

He circled around and landed quite close to us. We scrambled in and he pulled pitch. Just as he dropped the nose, Joe Hart fell off of the troop seat onto George Page and I. He was bleeding from the mouth a bit, but we couldn't find anything else at first. We found later that he had been hit in the side by a single round, which penetrated his heart.

At the reunion, I talked to Dennis Iannozzo. He recalls that a tremendous amount of blood spattered on the inside of the windscreen before lift off, so we surmise that Joe was hit while we were on the ground.

The Outlaw barely made it back to Moc Hoa and the ship was so badly damaged that it had to go to Corpus Christi for major structural repairs.

We found ourselves in even deeper shit now than we had been in while we were in the field eating dirt. It seems that we had strayed over the line into Cambodia! In that area, even a surveyor couldn't find a landmark, but those things don't count. MACV sent a Rear Admiral to conduct an investigation

of the whole mess! I had to admit that I was new and green and couldn't find my butt with both hands, much less the Cambodian border. This was not a pleasing answer, but just about all I could muster. Can you imagine the Admiral going back to MACV and admitting that Navy pilots don't know how to navigate? I really think that is what he was so ripped about!

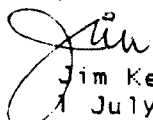
The Admiral left and I went back to Binh Thuy to "sort it all out".

George Page was flown to Japan, then to San Francisco, where he finally died of his wounds. Lloyd Williams was awarded the Navy Cross for his race across that field and I got a Silver Star for some obscure reason (to me anyway!)

US Forces entered Cambodia in force in April 1970. That was our first chance to look for remains at the crash site. I was back in CONUS by then and don't know what was done. The Army Graves Registration people are pretty well organized, though, so I suspect that the site was visited.

I'm not sure why Dick Reardon's remains were never recovered. There were several stories circulating at the reunion, but I didn't have time to sort them out and I took no notes. It would seem that we could resolve a lot of questions if we had a bulletin board to post them on and some way of swapping info a little faster than the mail/Wolfram hookup.

Sincerely,

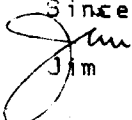
  
Jim Keyes  
1 July 1989

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Dear Don:

This is a revision of my letter of 28 March 1989 to George Le Duc. It is based on conversations with Dennis Iannozzo at the reunion.

I still haven't found the paperwork on this incident in my rat's nest, but it hasn't been tossed, so I'll come up with it soon and promise to copy it and send it to you as soon as it appears.

Sincerely,

  
Jim

Keyes