

CALL, JOHN HENRY III

Name: John Henry Call III

Rank/Branch: O2/US Air Force

Unit: 37th Air Rescue Squadron, Da Nang, South Vietnam

Date of Birth: 09 February 1947

Home City of Record: Potomac MD

Date of Loss: 06 April 1972

Country of Loss: South Vietnam

Loss Coordinates: 164658N 1070157E (YD170595)

Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered

Category: 2

Acft/Vehicle/Ground: HH53C

Personnel in Incident: April 2: Robin F. Gatwood; Wayne L. Bolte; Anthony Giannangeli; Charles A. Levis; Henry M. Serex; (all missing from the EB66). LtCol. Icaal Hambleton (rescued after 12 days from EB66). Ronald P. Paschall; Byron K. Kulland; John W. Frink (all missing from UH1H rescue helicopter); Jose M. Astorga (captured and released in 1973 from UH1H). April 3: William J. Henderson (captured and released in 1973 from OV10A rescue craft); Mark Clark (rescued after 12 days from OV10A rescue craft). April 6: James H. Alley; Allen J. Avery; Peter H. Chapman; John H. Call; William R. Pearson; Roy D. Prater (all KIA/BNR from HH53C "Jolly 52" rescue chopper). Also in very close proximity to "Bat 21" on April 3: Allen D. Christensen; Douglas L. O'Neil; Edward W. Williams; Larry A. Zich (all missing from UH1H). April 7: Bruce C. Walker (evaded 11 days); Larry F. Potts (captured & died in POW camp) (both missing from OV10A).

REMARKS: CRASH FIRE - AIR SEARCH NEG - J

SYNOPSIS: On the afternoon of April 2, 1972, two Thailand-based EB66 aircraft (Bat 21 and Bat 22), from the 30th Air Division, were flying pathfinder escort for a cell of B52s bombing near the DMZ. Bat 21 took a direct SAM hit and the plane went down. A single beeper signal was heard, that of navigator Col. Icaal Hambleton. At this time it was assumed the rest of the crew died in the crash. The crew included Maj. Wayne L. Bolte, pilot; 1Lt. Robin F. Gatwood, LtCol. Anthony R. Giannangeli, LtCol. Charles A. Levis, and Maj. Henry M. Serex, all crew members. It should be noted that the lowest ranking man aboard this plane was Gatwood, a First Lieutenant. This was not an ordinary crew, and its members, particularly Hambleton, would be a prize capture for the enemy because of military knowledge they possessed.

It became critical, therefore, that the U.S. locate Hambleton, and any other surviving crew members before the Vietnamese did - and the Vietnamese were trying hard to find them first.

An Army search and rescue team was nearby and dispatched two UH1H "slicks" and two UH1B "Cobras". When they approached Hambleton's position just before dark, at about 50 feet off the ground, with one of the AH1G Cobra gunships flying at 300 feet for cover, two of the helicopters were shot down. One, the Cobra (Blue Ghost 28) reached safety and the crew was picked up, without having seen the other downed helicopter. The other, a UH1H from F Troop, 8th Cavalry, 196th Brigade, had just flown over some huts into a clearing when they encountered ground fire, and the helicopter exploded. Jose Astorga, the gunner, was injured in the chest and knee by the gunfire. Astorga became unconscious, and when he recovered, the helicopter was on the ground. He found the pilot, 1Lt. Byron K. Kulland, lying outside the helicopter. WO John W. Frink, the co-pilot, was strapped in his seat and conscious. The crew chief, SP5 Ronald P. Paschall, was pinned by his leg in the helicopter, but alive. WO Franks urged Astorga to leave them, and Astorga was captured. He soon observed the aircraft to be hit by automatic weapons fire, and to explode with the rest of the crew inside. He never saw the rest of the crew again. Astorga was released by the North Vietnamese in 1973.

The following day, Nail 38, an OV10A equipped with electronic rescue gear

enabling its crew to get a rapid fix on its rescue target entered Hambleton's area and was shot down. The crew, William J. Henderson and Mark Clark, both parachuted out safely. Henderson was captured and released in 1973. Clark evaded for 12 days and was subsequently rescued.

On April 3, the day Nail 38 was shot down, a UH1H "slick" went down in the same area carrying a crew of four enlisted Army personnel. They had no direct connection to the rescue of Bat 21, but were very probably shot down by the same SAM installations that downed Bat 21. The helicopter, from H/HQ, 37th Signal Battalion, 1st Signal Brigade, had left Marble Mountain Airfield, Da Nang, on a standard resupply mission to signal units in and around Quang Tri City. The crew, consisting of WO Douglas L. O'Neil, pilot; CW2 Larry A. Zich, co-pilot; SP5 Allen D. Christensen, crew chief; and SP4 Edward W. Williams, gunner; remain missing in action.

On April 6, an attempt was made to pick up Clark and Hambleton which resulted in an HH53C helicopter being shot down. The chopper was badly hit. The helicopter landed on its side and continued to burn, consuming the entire craft, and presumably, all 6 men aboard. The crew of this aircraft consisted of James H. Alley; Allen J. Avery, John H. Call III, Peter H. Chapman, William R. Pearson, and Roy D. Prater. Search and rescue noted no signs of survivors, but it is felt that the Vietnamese probably know the fate of this crew because of the close proximity of the downed aircraft to enemy locations.

On April 7 another Air Force OV10A went down in the area with Larry Potts and Bruce Walker aboard. Walker, the Air Force pilot of the aircraft, evaded capture 11 days, while it is reported that Potts was captured and died in Quang Binh prison. Potts, the observer, was a Marine Corps officer. Walker's last radio transmission to search and rescue was for SAR not to make an attempt to rescue, the enemy was closing in. Both men remain unaccounted for.

Hambleton and Clark were rescued after 12 incredible days. Hambleton continually changed positions and reported on enemy activity as he went, even to the extent of calling in close air strikes near his position. He was tracked by a code he devised relating to the length and lie direction of various golf holes he knew well. Another 20 or so Americans were not so fortunate.

In July 1986, the daughter of Henry Serex learned that, one week after all search and rescue had been "called off" for Bat 21, another mission was mounted to recover "another downed crewmember" from Bat 21. She doesn't know whether or not it is her father or another man on the EB66 aircraft. No additional information has been released. When the movie "Bat 21" was released, she was horrified to learn that virtually no mention of the rest of the crew, including her father, was made.

In Vietnam, to most fighting men, the man that fought beside them, whether in the air or on the ground, was worth dying for. Each understood that the other would die for him if necessary. Thus, also considering the critical knowledge possessed by Col. Hambleton and some of the others, the seemingly uncanny means taken to recover Clark and Hambleton are not so unusual at all.

What defies logic and explanation, however, is that the government that sent these men to battle can distort or withhold information to their families, and knowingly abandon hundreds of men known or strongly suspected to be in enemy hands.

Thousands of reports have been received by the U.S. Government indicating that Americans are still alive, in captivity in Southeast Asia. It has been 17 years for those who may have survived the 1972 Easter crashes and rescue attempts. How much longer must they wait for their country to bring "peace with honor" to them and bring them home?