

FAX COVER PAGE

DATE June 8, 1995
TO Jack Glennon
FAX NUMBER (804) 431-8754
FROM Tom Marshall
NUMBER OF PAGES 9 (including cover page)

If the above referenced number of pages are not completely received, contact Angela at (904) 434-6783.

Jack:

I thought since you were meeting with Davis, you might give him this copy of his action for review.

This has been updated from your version, based upon Sloniker's tapes.

Ask Don if I can get a copy of this mailed back to me with his recommendations.

I'd also like to get a picture of his Huey in the rice paddy. I'll be at my condo in Pensacola all weekend.
Call collect (904/932-7789).

Tom

486-4949
office

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Tom

Camp Evans area

10:20 pm

Don Davis, a First Lieutenant newly assigned to Charlie Company, had preflighted the Nighthawk Huey and was co-pilot in a mission, with CW2 Don Mears. They had been called for a mission at 9:45. They had taken off in the Nighthawk Huey with the large search light and mini-gun mounted in the Huey's cargo bay. The overcast was about 500 feet and very ragged. Don Mears, the aircraft commander, had the experience of many Nighthawk missions under his belt. Mears was a very qualified pilot, again with the experience of Charlie Company in the most active area of South Vietnam with the most diversified flying missions and intensity of difficulty.

The Nighthawk mission tonight was the usual, bouncing in and out of the overcast, until they bumped into a wall of clouds that didn't break up. Mears, knowing he was seconds from the mountain ridgeline, immediately began a climb away from the mountains, calling GCA for radar vectors back to Camp Evans Airfield. In the ascending turn, Mears developed a condition known as "vertigo", where the inner ear deceives the mind and provides incorrect balance and sensitivity information. The senses contradicted what the eyes report to the brain from the aircraft instrumentation and the feel of the aircraft in the "seat of the pants". He feared he was entering a catastrophic climb or roll and he immediately told Davis, "Get on, take over on instruments!"

Don Davis had little actual instrument experience and was on one of his first night instrument missions. He was surprised by the call to take over. He reflexively took over the aircraft, brought it to what he thought a level attitude was, and was also in vertigo, believing that the aircraft was diving. He instinctively pulled collective (increased pitch and power of the main rotor system) and unknowingly entered a roll or loop.

Mears, in the next three or four seconds, regained his senses and

realized they were now going through an inverted roll. To his horror, he knew that inverting the Huey could result in destruction of the rotor system with negative G's. He immediately took the aircraft back from Davis and in an incomprehensible few seconds later, found himself crashed, sitting in a rice patty, in a destroyed aircraft. Amazingly, all four crewmembers living through it. Mears had a serious compression of the spine. Davis was amazingly uninjured as were the crewchief and doorgunner. It had been a remarkably unbelievable series of events. The ultimate catastrophe, death, had been averted by Mears in milliseconds. It would take a while for the recovery bird and Medevac to reach them.

Davis, who'd only been in-country less than three weeks, was in a state of shock, slowly assimilating what he had survived. This would be chalked up to experience. The nighthawk mission had nearly ended as tragically as I had feared it would, in my incident with Keith in the preceding month. They were damn lucky to be alive! The crewchief, Specialist-4 Charles Bobo, was also thankful to have survived, not knowing he'd be dead with CW2 Paul Stewart, in eleven short days.

Ranger North

Laos

On February 19, the northern flank of LZ Ranger North came under massed human wave attacks, supported by field artillery and tank fire. Resupply to Ranger North, Ranger South and Hill 31 had been cancelled for three days. The few helicopters attempting resupply were shot up before even reaching the LZ's.

Specialist - 5 Denis Fujii, stranded on Ranger North, after his helicopter had been shot down, was directing tactical air strikes for the ARVN's. If he hadn't been so effective, they would have been overrun the previous day. Plans were under way to extract him, regardless of the enemy fire.

February 20, 1971

Laos

Dustoff pilot, Warrant Officer John Rauen had flown into Laos to attempt a Medevac. The aircraft was riddled with bullets and they attempted to return to Khe Sanh. The aircraft crashed and burned on final, killing Rauen. Another Worwac 70-5 classmember dead.

* * * * *

An emergency resupply of Ranger North and extraction of Specialist Fujii was commenced. A flight of 21 Hueys was led by a Phoenix Platoon led by Captain David Nelson, Aircraft Commander. The Company Commander and Flight Leader was Major James Lloyd, flying in Nelson's Huey.

An American, Specialist-4 Dennis Fujii, was stranded on Firebase Ranger North, four miles inside Laos, west of the DMZ. The NVA were massing tanks and preparing to overrun it. Little, if any, time was left. In desperation, a gambling attempt to extract Fujii proceeded from Khe Sanh to Ranger North.

The Vietnamese Rangers had not been resupplied in two days due

to intense anti-aircraft fire. Lt. Colonel William Peachey, the Air Mission Commander, decided the flight could not make the approach. However, Specialist Fujii was still in radio contact.

An American was on the ground, in the most dangerous circumstances. Nelson and Lloyd agreed. They had to get him out. With Peachey's acknowledgement, they dashed in low level, landing among mortar bursts and hundreds of rounds of AK-47, 51 cal, and 23mm fire. Fujii was hauled aboard, along with seventeen ARVN's who wanted out desperately.

As they departed, rounds impacted. The Phoenix Huey began trailing the white smoke of vaporizing fuel and burning oil. A few seconds later, the turbine engine belched black smoke. Then fire erupted from the engine compartment, flames leaping back to the tail boom! Lt. Colonel Peachey, the air mission commander, radioed, "Fire, get out! Get out!"

Lloyd, who'd only been qualified in helicopters a few short months, after years in airplanes, reached, as taught, to shut the engine fuel flow off. Huey's generally flew for a few seconds before exploding!

Nelson, fearing they would crash land to certain death with the NVA, slapped Lloyd's hand away from the fuel cut-off switch, but it was too late. The engine died. Nelson calmly told Lloyd, "now we're committed" and entered autorotation onto Ranger South. Ranger South was also in the process of being overrun by NVA, approximately 800 meters south of Ranger North. Nelson slid the flaming, smoking Huey to a powerless landing on Ranger South, again among bullets flying, mortars exploding. Despite being grossly overloaded with seventeen passengers, shot up, on fire and powerless, Nelson had completed the perfect autorotation!

When they slid to a stop, everyone quickly evacuated but Nelson, who was calmly shutting down the aircraft as if it'd been a

normal landing. The gunner grabbed Nelson from his seat, pulling him out of the aircraft, which could explode at any second. Nelson scuffed the toe of his jumpboots exiting the Huey. Most, running away, went left but Nelson, Fujii and the gunner ran to the right and dove into a bunker. Ranger South was taking very heavy fire at the time.

Overhead, the circling Phoenix pilots had a commanding view. The pilots grimaced as they watched the Huey burn and their friends running from it. Fire and heat was intense. The tail boom sagged to the ground as the crew ran from the flames.

Without asking permission, Warrant Officers Butch Doan and Pat McKeaney dove to get them when they realized Nelson was going in. Americans were down, their friends! They made a tightly spiraling dive, nearly vertical, down 3,000 feet to the left side of the burning Huey. Green 51 caliber tracers and fluffy white puffs of 23mm airbursts enveloped them during the descent. One 23mm hit directly on the rotor mast, badly damaging the main rotor system vibration dampeners.

With Lloyd and the crewchief aboard Doan's Phoenix bird, they departed under fire, taking many serious hits leaving Ranger South. Doan and McKeaney's Huey was badly hit, but they'd make it a mile to the relative safety of a larger ARVN position, also under attack. As Doan crash landed at Hill 31, they radioed the others that they didn't have Nelson, Fujii or the gunner on board!

Doan and McKeaney, with their crewmen, barely made it to Hill 31. They'd taken a 23mm hit on the mast which caused a horrible vertical vibration. The Huey's collective actually bounced, the damage was so bad. It would have only taken another minute, possibly two, for them to break apart fatally in midair. The Phoenix had been lucky, one more time, but good luck was quickly being used up.

Doan and McKeaney radioed the others that half the Phoenix crew was still on the ground. Captain Don Davis and Captain John Bottman came in next, covered by Skip Butler, Redskin 15, with 2nd Lieutenant John Henry Bond in the front seat.

Bottman descended the Huey east of Ranger South to approach low level, trying to avoid the murderous antiaircraft fire above the hill. Doan and McKeaney had barely survived. Davis, the copilot, began calling out critical engine and flight instruments. Bottman kept his eyes outside the cockpit, as they raced between the trees. Davis unbelievably called out, "Airspeed,....145 knots." Bottman had the empty Huey exceeding its design speed limits, a desperate attempt to disrupt the NVA gunners aim.

They landed next to the right side of the now pile of smoking debris that had been the Huey. Only a piece of the tail boom left.

Bottman landed his Huey and sat thirty very anxious seconds, under fire, waiting for Nelson. Nelson came stepping across the LZ under fire, on his heels so he wouldn't scuff the toes of his boots. (Nelson's boots were a legend. He kept them highly shined. He was known as the only person who could get around the Phoenix area at Camp Evans, during monsoons, and not get mud on them boots.) Nelson dove into the back of the aircraft, rolling on his back, feet in the air, as he hit. He wouldn't scuff his boots further. While climbing out, with bullets whizing around them, Nelson tapped Davis' shoulder. Davis turned to find Nelson disgustingly pointing to a scratch in the black mirror glaze toe of his boot.

Fujii would spend one more night in Laos, but he'd be evacuated early the next morning. Bottman and Davis carried the Phoenix crewmembers home to Camp Evans. The second rescue bird had been the "charm". The Phoenix lived their rule, when one bird went down, another went to get him, and it continued until accomplished!

The Phoenix pilot's actions would be memorialized with Silver Stars for the pilots and Distinguished Flying Crosses for the crewmen. Specialist-4 Fujii would receive a Silver Star for his actions as a Forward Air Controller, after surviving his helicopter crashing on Ranger North.

The Phoenix crewchiefs and doorgunners had excelled in their duties. Their personal courage and gunnery skills were acknowledged with Distinguished Flying Crosses, very rare awards for Army aircrews. Specialist - 5 Ronald Merek, Specialist - 4 William Starbuck, Specialist - 4 Brian Fitzgerald, Specialist - 4 Clarence Davis and Private First Class Matthew Regner were the recipients. They made front page news in the "Stars and Stripes", as well as "The Screaming Eagle".

On the way out, Redskin pilot Skip Butler ran out of ammo on his Cobra, but still dove on a 51 cal machinegun, firing at the Huey. Davis thought it was one of the bravest things he's ever seen. Davis got a silver star for his actions; Butler was not recognized for his valor, just another day at work for a Redskin.

On the following day, Ranger North and Ranger South were overrun by NVA tanks and troops. The ARVN' suffered horrendous losses.

Refuel Point

Khe Sanh Combat Base

Captain Don Davis was co-pilot in a Phoenix Huey, being refuelled after another mission in Laos. As he sat there, he noticed an aircraft from the 238th Helicopter Company, Gunrunners. He knew he had a friend Norm Miller, his West Point roommate, flying with the Gunrunners. Davis asked the doorgunner to walk over to the aircraft and see if the pilot or co-pilot knew of Captain Miller. A few moments later, he noticed an individual leaving the cockpit, coming over to talk to him. He was carrying something in his left hand. Norm Miller came up to Davis' side, stuck out his hand to a friendly handshake. Miller then held up the head of a cyclic stick. Norm proceeded to tell him that the cyclic had been shot off between his legs, while flying the previous day in Laos. They had a good laugh over it. It was proof of the environment they were flying in. Davis laughingly told Miller of his landing at LZ Lolo where he took 11 hits on the console between his head and Butch Doan's head. Davis recounted that Doan just cracked up laughing, as if it was nothing but a joke and kept on flying.