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But interesting!

10 Apr 68

TO: PIO, 308th CAB

FROM: PIO, 17th AHC

**"KILL CONFIRMED -- THROUGH THE CHIN BUBBLE!!"**

"I never expected to use my .38," said 1LT Ed Waddell of Vacaville, Calif., when he returned from a particularly hairy mission April 9th. But use his .38 he did, and with exceptional results. LT Waddell, a UH-1H pilot of the 17th AHC's Kingsmen, was commanding a flight of choppers called out at night to rescue a small patrol pinned down by a large enemy force in the mountains west of Hue. When he and his wingship, flown by 1LT Mike Sanitta of Yonkers, N.Y. and WO1 Greg Benoit, Farmington, Michigan, arrived at the scene of action, they were flying under a ceiling of less than 100 feet, over a dense jungle. They had to fly low level at hover speeds, using their boxing radios to try to locate the tiny patrol in the thick growth. Finally the patrol called on their radios to say that the helicopter was hovering above the trees right over their heads. At that time, Charlie decided to make his presence known. He opened up on the helicopter from three sides with automatic weapons. "There wasn't anything we could do except sit there and trust the gunships," said LT Waddell's copilot, WO1 Robert L. Smith, of Hawkinsville, Ga. "We'd have never make it out of there if it weren't for the landers' cover," LT Waddell agreed. While the slick ship lowered ropes through the jungle canopy to the trapped patrol, the gunships, led by 1LT Charles E. Rake, of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and his copilot, Al Schibi, of Winslow, Arizona, blasted the area with rocket and minigun fire. 1LT Rudy Perkins, of Westbrook, Conn. later remarked, "Charlie threw everything he had at the slick -- I still don't see how he got it home." His copilot, WO1 Larry Green, of Phoenix Arizona, pumped 5000 rounds of minigun into the trees around the hovering slick. "He had settled below the treetops to get his ropes to touch the ground, so the only way we could see him was by the light of the fires from our rockets," he said. LT Waddell had inched his ship down between three large trees by cutting the foliage away with his main rotor blade. "It's hard on the aircraft -- we ruined a set of rotor blades -- but it was certain death for those six men if we couldn't get them out, so I figure it was worth it." By the light of the fires the pilots could see figures moving through the brush to get closer to the hovering aircraft. As they grew closer their tan NVA uniforms were clearly recognizable even in the subdued light. The aircraft began taking hits heavily as the enemy poured in on it. Rounds passed only inches from the crew, but miraculously none of them were hit and the ship kept running. They were only hovering there for a few moments as the men on the ground secured themselves to the ropes hanging from the ship, but to everyone involved, it seemed an eternity. The air was filled with tracers from the enemy and the guns of the slashing gunships.

During the agonizing seconds of waiting, WO1 Smith was holding the ship steady in the trees, when LT Waddell looked in front of the aircraft and saw a figure step into the glare of a rocket fire with an automatic rifle at his hip. As the enemy soldier began to fire, LT Waddell grabbed his pistol and fired five shots through the chin bubble of the helicopter. He saw the NVA troop stagger backwards and fall into the shadows.

"You got him!" came the shout over the radio from the patrol on the ground. "We're hooked up. Let's go!" As he lifted the men out of the trees, his wingman, LT Sonitta dived in to take his place and extract the rest of the patrol.

But the action wasn't over. The overcast had closed in to almost zero.

When the aircraft flew high enough for the men hanging on the ropes to clear the trees, it was completely blinded by the heavy clouds. By homing to a tiny beacon, they flew back in the clouds through treacherous downdrafts between the mountaintops to the nearest fire support base.

"That was the roughest mission I've flown," said LT Rake, his eyes still wide with the excitement. LT Waddell looked in silent wonder at his empty pistol. "I never thought I'd have to use it," he said. That's the stuff heroes are made of. Nobody ever expects something like that to happen to them, but when it does, they react like LT Waddell and LT Rake and the men who flew with them -- with courage and daring, offering their lives to save others. And the happy ending came when the pilots were able to share a handshake and a beer with the six men who only hours before were trapped deep in the heart of enemy territory.

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