

Leave No Man Behind

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Part IV-9 Indian Summer Navy Late '66

On August 11, 1966, Lieutenant Commander R. D. Nichols and Lieutenant Junior Grade Rick Grant and their crewmen were vectored to the Fai Tsi Long Archipelago and the southern sprinkling of those dangerous islands to respond to the downing of an F-8 pilot, Lieutenant Junior Grade C.A. Balesteri. Weaving in between the islands and thus avoiding any over-flights, Grant detected the smoke flare of Balesteri at the base of one of the 400-foot cliffs of Isle Des L'Union. Battered by the surf, the downed man was reluctant to swim out to the helicopter, having lost his raft making his precarious landfall. AX3 Gary W. Smith jumped in and swam a raft to shore and both men held on to the raft as they got out far enough for Nichols to land in the water and pick them up. The dangerous water landing was necessary when crewman AMH2 Royce L. Roberts discovered the hoist had suffered a malfunction. Strangely, there was no hostile fire from the heavily garrisoned, normally alert and active defenses, and the water landing pickup went off without incident.