

Jimmy G. Conrad DVM

September 7, 2001

This is my account of the rescue of Marvin Mayfield on the 27 July 1966.

On the morning of 27 July 1966 we were the SAR ready crew aboard the USS Ranger. We received an alert fairly early in the morning, as I remember it was around 3 AM. We launched shortly after that and proceeded in darkness and rain in the direction of the last reported location of Mr. Mayfield.

We crossed the beach in darkness and were immediately taken under fire. The ground below the helo was still in darkness and if it hadn't been for the knowledge that we were witnessing a blizzard of ground fire, one could imagine hundreds of fireflies all winking on and off all over the ground below us. There were also several anti-aircraft sites firing at us and at one point during a rather violent maneuver where I was thrown away from my M60 mount and back into the center of the aircraft, I could see the detonations of the AAA shells directly in front of the aircraft through the front windscreen. I remember Mr. Clark pulling back on the cyclic at that point so that the aircraft virtually came to a complete stop in the air.

During the ingress, we had the support of 3 Air Force bomber aircraft which helped suppress the AA fire. Since they were carrying a load of 1000 pound iron bombs, their assistance was somewhat limited because of the number of AAA sites in that location.

One of the things that my second crewman (George Armstrong) and I had done that helped us suppress some of the fire coming up at us was to use the boxes of tracer ammunition we had hoarded over the previous several weeks. We had stripped several boxes of M60 ammunition of all of their tracer shells and linked these tracer shells together in continuous belts. Firing belts of straight tracer allowed us to concentrate our fire on the most active AAA sites and seemed to be somewhat effective in fire suppression.

One of those AAA sites was located 100 to 200 yards to the west of the location of the hiding place of Mr. Mayfield and it was this site that delivered the most continuous and concentrated fire in our direction. It was necessary to fire over the location of the downed pilot in order to bring any suppressive fire on that site. Mr. Clark found it necessary to caution me on at least one occasion that my fire was getting close to the location of the pilot.

On our second pass over the area, and when Mr. Clark and Mr. Smith had determined the location of Mr. Mayfield, Mr. Clark brought the aircraft down on the west side of the hedge row that Mr. Mayfield was hiding in and about 30 feet away from his hiding place. This placed the aircraft

between the AAA site mentioned previously and the pilot. The AAA site was situated on a small rise to the west and above the place where we landed which gave us some cover from the site which was located directly up the rise from where the pilot was hiding. Mr. Mayfield ran to and leaped in through the cargo door where I was stationed. At about the same moment, Mr. Armstrong called out from his station at the front door that "Here they come...let's get out of here!" According to Mr. Armstrong when we discussed the mission later, as the pilot gained the safety of the aircraft, the crew of the AAA site came over the edge of the hill and directly towards us. Mr. Armstrong was manning his M60 in that location and was able to cover our retreat, since apparently the crew of the AAA site was not fully prepared to be fired upon as they approached the aircraft.

We had no sooner cleared the beach when Mr. Mayfield began agitating for us to go back to pick up his RIO whom he felt was probably located in the same area. Mr. Clark, in what I felt was a very generous gesture considering that we were in the process of celebrating our escape from what had appeared to be certain death or worse, asked each of us whether we would be willing to go back into that maelstrom again to pick up the RIO. Mr. Clark made it clear to Mr. Mayfield that under no circumstances would he be allowed to accompany us on a return trip, that he would be placed in a raft and picked up on again, should we survive a return to that area to search for his crewman. Apparently the decision to return was discussed at higher levels and it was decided that we should return to the carrier with Mr. Mayfield and that rescue of the RIO would be given to other crews.

It is important, I believe, in conjunction with this narrative to point out the rather severe deficiencies in aircraft, weapons and crew that performed this mission. The aircraft we were using was not designed nor equipped to perform missions of this nature. It was designed to hover over the water and lower dipping sonar in order to track submarines. There were some modifications made to the aircraft, such as small amounts of armor plating in strategic locations, however this was never an ideal aircraft for land SAR. It was entirely too large, too slow, too vulnerable and much too loud to be an effective rescue platform.

With the possible exception of Mr. Clark, none of the other 3 members of the crew had more than minimal SAR training. With respect to Mr. Armstrong and myself, we had a total of no more than 30 minutes acclimation and orientation in the use of the M60. This weapon was totally inadequate for the demands of the mission since it was not designed for firing at targets over 3000 feet away. The muzzle velocity was so low that when fired at an altitude of 3000 feet, and at angles of near 45 degrees from the vertical the impact of the rounds would cause no more damage than the same round dropped from that height. In live fire practice at floating drop tanks on previous missions Mr. Armstrong and I had determined that while flying at an altitude of 3000 feet, it was virtually impossible to place our rounds on a target, and that the best we could hope for was to be able to place them in a very general area. This was particularly true when the aircraft speed was greater than 30 or 40 knots. It was this observation that led us to realize that if we were ever in a situation where we had to use the M60 to suppress ground fire, that the intimidation factor of firing straight tracer ammunition was our best hope. It is my opinion that the reason we as crewmen were able to successfully suppress some of the ground fire directed at us is solely because we were firing straight tracer ammunition instead of the usual 1:7 tracer.

It is also my opinion that the only reason this mission ended in success is the skill of Mr. Clark. The ground fire we experienced was extremely intense, yet he remained calm and collected during the entire mission and skillfully avoided the AAA fire from the many sites that were located in this area. During one of the avoidance maneuvers he performed I was left half hanging out of the cargo door and looking ahead of us could see many crisscrossed tracer tracks just ahead of the cockpit and then looking behind the aircraft could see just as many more crisscrossing behind us. Somehow Mr. Clark managed to avoid the fire from the many AAA sites and successfully complete the mission.

Jimmy G. Conrad DVM

ON THIS DATE, JIMMY G CONRAD, DVM PERSONALLY
APPEARED BEFORE ME AND SIGNED THIS DOCUMENT -
3 PAGES TOTAL.

STATE OF OREGON
LANE COUNTY

Allan C Post
MY COMMISSION EXPIRES JULY 23, 2004

