

“STING 61” -- Aircraft 68-0357

Major Kevin D. Churchill, Aircraft Commander/Co-Pilot | Major Kenneth A. Macdonald, Pilot
MSgt Bradley Martens, Flight Engineer (Seat) | SSgt Erik G. Fricsons, Flight Engineer (Right Scanner)
CMSgt Scott Hedglin, Aerial Gunner (Left Scanner) | MSgt Ryon L. Crowley, Aerial Gunner (Tail Scanner)

Official Notification: 0804Z | Crew Notified (approx): 0810Z | Airborne: 0840Z | Landed at HDAM to transfer Injuries: 0930Z

Day 1 - Sunday, 22 Jun 03

0730Z: Churchill, Macdonald, Watkins show at Planning Tent to begin scheduled preflight preparation for daily functional check flights. Within next half hour, Planning Tent personnel begin to hear rumblings of injuries to USMC personnel on Godoria Range. Watkins directed to proceed to flightline and begin preflighting available aircraft for possible incident support and MEDEVAC. Macdonald proceeded to get weather and air activity, while Churchill planned for flight to Godoria.

0810Z: JOC Chief informs 20 SOS/MC of 2 CH-53E's being destroyed on Godoria Range, with 6 injured personnel, 3 critical. Shortly thereafter, Martens and Fricsons arrive at Planning Tent to pick up DMU kit. Joined by Churchill and Macdonald, all then proceeded to flightline and were directed by maintenance personnel to aircraft 68-0357. Martens and Fricsons performed preflight in short order, absolute minimum time. Churchill, Macdonald and Martens run up the cockpit systems, while Fricsons, joined by Hedglin and Crowley, prepare the cabin with pole litters for MEDEVAC. Permission to launch ASAP is granted. Capt Schumpp and crew have arrived at aircraft 69-5790 and are approximately 10-20 minutes behind STING 61 at this point.

0840Z: STING 61 takes off from Djibouti single-ship with USAF flight surgeon and medical technician, US Army surgeon (O-6) and 4 STS personnel -- approximately 7 people total. Ceilings are high, but smoke and blowing dust reduce visibility to 2 miles at best, ¾ of a mile at worst. STING 61 proceeds direct to incident site on southern pinnacle (altitude approximately 600 ft), being passed coordinates enroute from LEOPARD 76. On-scene control is provided by JAGUAR 67 on TAD 50. Churchill directs radio calls between STING 61, JAGUAR 67 and LEOPARD 76, to ensure all remain informed of current situation and ETA.

0905Z: STING 61 flies up west side of pinnacle to survey ground situation. Maj Macdonald elects to circle the site to the east, shooting a perfect pinnacle approach into the wind. Fricsons and Hedglin call the approach in, while Crowley scans the volcanic rocks and LZ for additional obstructions from the tail. Back-end crew calls for the aircraft to turn its nose 90 degrees to the right and place the MEDEVAC party directly to the rear of the aircraft to decrease loading time. 7 wounded (3 critical and on stretchers) and 7 other medical and support personnel are loaded, bringing total onboard to 27 personnel (6 crew, 7 organic medical, 7 injured and 7 support personnel from the site). LZ fouled with unexploded ordinance and burning fuel tanks that had not yet exploded just yards away.

0910Z: Churchill makes the departure from the pinnacle, descending down and to the right along the eastern coast. The crew elects to maintain the coast due to decreased visibility and deconfliction with STING 62. While monitoring weight, power and cruise guide indications, the crew flies at VNE, sometimes reaching 168KGS enroute to Djibouti.

0930Z: STING 61 lands at HDAM 50 minutes after takeoff - wounded transloaded to waiting ambulances on the taxiway. Reset for additional taskings.

1025Z: STING 61 takes off HDAM with JSOAC Safety Officer and Marine Interim Investigating Officer, as well as small security and investigation team. Picked up 4 personnel from mishap site. Landed at LZ Sheila on valley floor and picked up 20 personnel from 10th Mountain, returning all personnel to HDAM.

1435Z: STING 61 takes off HDAM with food/water supplies and a few additional investigators and security personnel. Circle mishap site for combat camera to document site from the air. Conducts brief search of surrounding terrain for additional suspected missing personnel, but is thwarted by onset of darkness and mountain turbulence. Delivered personnel to mishap site and then flew to LZ Sheila to pick up 29 personnel from 10th Mountain from two separate locations. Left 5 personnel to watch the 2 unit vehicles overnight.