

**Information on U.S. Air Force helicopter HH-53C tail number 68-10365**

Date: 04/06/1972 MIA-POW file reference number: 1817

Incident number: 72040610.KIA

Unit: 37th ARRS

South Vietnam – UTM grid coordinates: YD170595

Original source(s) and document(s) from which the incident was created or updated: Defense Intelligence Agency Reference Notes. Defense Intelligence Agency Helicopter Loss database. Also: 1817 ()

Loss to Inventory

**Crew Members:**

C TSG AVERY ALLEN JONES BNR

C SGT PEARSON WILLIAM ROY BNR

C TSG PRATER ROY DEWITT RR

P CPT CHAPMAN PETER HAUDEN II RR

P CPT CALL JOHN HENRY III BNR

Passengers and/or other participants:

SGT ALLEY JAMES HAROLD, AF, PX, BNR

**REFNO Synopsis:**

Personnel in Incident: April 2: Robin F. Gatwood; Wayne L. Bolte; Anthony Giannangeli; Charles A. Levis; Henry M. Serex; (all missing from the EB-66). Lt Col. Iceal Hambleton (rescued after 12 days from EB-66). Ronald P. Paschall; Byron K. Kulland; John W. Frink (all missing from UH-1H rescue helicopter), Jose M. Astorga (captured and released in 1973 from UH-1H). April 3: William J. Henderson (captured and released in 1973 from OV-10A rescue craft); Mark Clark (rescued after 12 days from OV-10A rescue craft). April 6: James H. Alley; Allen J. Avery; Peter H. Chapman; John H. Call; William R. Pearson; Roy D. Prater (all KIA/BNR from HH-53C "Jolly 52" rescue chopper). Also in very close proximity to "Bat 21" on April 3: Allen D. Christensen; Douglas L. O'Neil; Edward W. Williams; Larry A. Zich (all missing from UH-1H). April 7: Bruce C. Walker (evaded 11 days); Larry F. Potts (captured & died in POW camp) (both missing from OV-10A).

**SYNOPSIS:**

On the afternoon of April 2, 1972, two Thailand-based EB66 aircraft (Bat 21 and Bat 22), from the 30th Air Division, were flying pathfinder escort for a cell of B52s bombing near the DMZ. Bat 21 took a direct SAM hit and the plane went down. A single beeper signal was heard, that of navigator Col. Iceal Hambleton. At this time it was assumed the rest of the crew died in the crash. The crew included Maj. Wayne L. Bolte, pilot; 1Lt. Robin F. Gatwood, LtCol. Anthony R. Giannangeli, LtCol. Charles A. Levis, and Maj. Henry M. Serex, all crew members. It should be noted that the lowest ranking man aboard this plane was Gatwood, a First Lieutenant. This was not an ordinary crew, and its members, particularly Hambleton, would be a prize capture for the enemy because of military knowledge they possessed. It became critical, therefore, that the U.S. locate Hambleton, and any other surviving crew members before the Vietnamese did - and the Vietnamese were trying hard to find them first. An Army search and rescue team was nearby and dispatched two UH-1H "slicks" and two UH-1B "Cobras". When they approached Hambleton's position just before dark, at about 50 feet off the ground, with one of the AH1G Cobra gunships flying at 300 feet for cover, two of the helicopters were shot down. One, the Cobra (Blue Ghost 28) reached safety and the crew was picked up, without having seen the other downed helicopter. The other, a UH-1H from F Troop, 8th Cavalry, 196th Brigade, had just flown over some huts into a clearing when they encountered ground fire, and the helicopter exploded. Jose Astorga, the gunner, was injured in the chest and knee by the gunfire. Astorga became unconscious, and when he recovered, the helicopter was on the ground. He found the pilot, 1Lt. Byron K. Kulland, lying outside the helicopter. WO John W. Frink, the co-pilot, was strapped in his seat and conscious. The crew chief, SP5 Ronald P. Paschall,

was pinned by his leg in the helicopter, but alive. WO Franks urged Astorga to leave them, and Astorga was captured. He soon observed the aircraft to be hit by automatic weapons fire, and to explode with the rest of the crew inside. He never saw the rest of the crew again. Astorga was released by the North Vietnamese in 1973. The following day, Nail 38, an OV-10A equipped with electronic rescue gear enabling its crew to get a rapid "fix" on its rescue target entered Hambleton's area and was shot down. The crew, William J. Henderson and Mark Clark, both parachuted out safely. Henderson was captured and released in 1973. Clark evaded for 12 days and was subsequently rescued. On April 3, the day Nail 38 was shot down, a UH-1H "slick" went down in the same area carrying a crew of four enlisted Army personnel. They had no direct connection to the rescue of Bat 21, but were very probably shot down by the same SAM installations that downed Bat 21. The helicopter, from H/HQ, 37th Signal Battalion, 1st Signal Brigade, had left Marble Mountain Airfield, Da Nang, on a standard resupply mission to signal units in and around Quang Tri City. The crew, consisting of WO Douglas L. O'Neil, pilot; CW2 Larry A. Zich, co-pilot; SP5 Allen D. Christensen, crew chief; and SP4 Edward W. Williams, gunner; remain missing in action. On April 6, an attempt was made to pick up Clark and Hambleton which resulted in an HH-53C helicopter being shot down. The chopper was badly hit. The helicopter landed on its side and continued to burn, consuming the entire craft, and presumably, all 6 men aboard. The crew of this aircraft consisted of James H. Alley, a photographer; Allen J. Avery, John H. Call III, Peter H. Chapman, William R. Pearson, and Roy D. Prater. Search and rescue noted no signs of survivors, but it is felt that the Vietnamese probably know the fate of this crew because of the close proximity of the downed aircraft to enemy locations. On April 7 another Air Force OV-10A went down in the area with Larry Potts and Bruce Walker aboard. Walker, the Air Force pilot of the aircraft, evaded capture 11 days, while it is reported that Potts was captured and died in Quang Binh prison. Potts, the observer, was a Marine Corps officer. Walker's last radio transmission to search and rescue was for SAR not to make an attempt to rescue, the enemy was closing in. Both men remain unaccounted for. Hambleton and Clark were rescued after 12 incredible days. Hambleton continually changed positions and reported on enemy activity as he went, even to the extent of calling in close air strikes near his position. He was tracked by a code he devised relating to the length and lie direction of various golf holes he knew well. Another 20 or so Americans were not so fortunate. In July 1986, the daughter of Henry Serex learned that, one week after all search and rescue had been "called off" for Bat 21, another mission was mounted to recover "another downed crewmember" from Bat 21. She doesn't know whether or not it is her father or another man on the EB-66 aircraft. No additional information has been released. When the movie "Bat 21" was released, she was horrified to learn that virtually no mention of the rest of the crew, including her father, was made. In Vietnam, to most fighting men, the man that fought beside them, whether in the air or on the ground, was worth dying for. Each understood that the other would die for him if necessary. Thus, also considering the critical knowledge possessed by Col. Hambleton and some of the others, the seemingly uncanny means taken to recover Clark and Hambleton are not so unusual at all

### **War Story:**

The Flight of Jolly Green 67 by Darrel Whitcomb. Jolly Green 67 was an HH-53 long range rescue helicopter assigned to the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRS) at Da Nang Airbase, South Vietnam. It was downed by enemy ground fire on 6 April, 1972, while attempting to rescue two American airmen who had been shot down and were hiding behind enemy lines. This was one of the key events in what would become the largest rescue operation of that war, the rescue of Bat 21. Bat 21 was an EB-66 electronic jamming and reconnaissance aircraft. On 2 April, it was hit and destroyed by a North Vietnamese surface to air missile as it and another EB-66, Bat 22, escorted three B-52s as they bombed advancing North Vietnamese units invading South Vietnam at the beginning of what has come to be known as the "Easter Offensive." Only one crewmember, Lt Col Iceal "Gene" Hambleton was able to eject from his stricken aircraft. His personal call sign for the rescue operation was Bat 21 Bravo. Immediately, US Army helicopters tried to rescue Lt Col Hambleton. But, the North Vietnamese guns drove them off and downed one - a UH1 "Huey," call sign Blueghost 39. Three of its crewmembers were killed and one was captured. The captured soldier was released by the North Vietnamese a year later. The bodies of the other three were eventually recovered and buried in

Arlington National cemetery in April, 1994. The next day, Jolly Greens from the 37th ARRS made two attempts to pick up Bat 21 Bravo. Both times, they were driven off with heavy damage to their aircraft. Additionally, an OV-10, call sign Nail 38, was hit and downed by an enemy missile. Its pilot Capt Bill Henderson, was captured. Its navigator, 1Lt Mark Clark, call sign Nail 38 Bravo, was able to hide and await rescue like Lt Col Hambleton. For two more days, rescue forces fought the weather and the enemy forces to try to rescue the two airmen. They could not get in. Instead, hundreds of airstrikes were put in to beat down the enemy gunners. But the 6th of April, dawned bright and clear. So, after 42 more airstrikes were put in, a rescue force of four HH-53s and six escorting A-1 "Sandy" aircraft launched to make another attempt to recover the two evading Americans. They were assisted by several forward air controllers in O-2s and OV-10s and numerous other support aircraft. Jolly Green 67 was designated to make the rescue attempt. But as it came to a hover over Bat 21 Bravo, it was raked by heavy enemy fire. The escorting "Sandy" A-1s tried to engage the enemy guns. But they could not get them all. And they could see what the ground fire was doing to the helicopter. So several shouted for the crew to fly out of the area. The crew of Jolly Green 67 aborted the rescue attempt and tried to maneuver their stricken aircraft to safety. But the enemy fire continued and so damaged the craft that it crashed in a huge fireball a few kilometers south of the survivors. The fire was intense and lasted several days. There were never any indications of survivors. The Sandy pilots were shocked by the turn of events. The other helicopters were ready to move into the area and make another attempt. But Sandy 01, the leader of the taskforce was not willing to risk another aircraft. He aborted the mission. It was just too dangerous. The next day, another OV-10 supporting the rescue, call sign Covey 282, was shot down in the same area. The pilot, 1Lt Bruce Walker, call sign Covey 282 Alpha, was on the ground and evading like the two earlier airmen. His crewman, US Marine 1Lt Larry Potts, was never heard from. With this news, General Abrams, the overall US commander in Saigon directed that there would be no more helicopter rescue efforts for the now three downed flyers. Instead, a ground team was formed to attempt to infiltrate through enemy lines and pick them up. It was planned and directed by US Marine Lt Col Andy Anderson, and lead by US Navy SEAL LT Tom Norris. From 10 through 12 April, the team operated through enemy lines and rescued 1Lt Clark and Lt Col Hambleton. They also intended to rescue 1Lt Walker. But on the 18th, he was discovered by Viet Cong troops and killed. The rescues were over. Later, Lt Tom Norris would get the Medal of Honor for the mission. This was the largest sustained rescue operation of the war. Over 800 airstrikes, to include B-52s, were put in in direct support. Numerous helicopters, A-1s and forward air controller aircraft were shot down or damaged. A total of eleven men were killed. But it was all done in the best traditions of the rescue forces. Their motto was: " That Others May Live." During the war, they rescued 3,883 downed American or allied airmen, sailors, marines and soldiers and made it possible for them to return home. And finally, we welcome you home, Jolly Green, and salute you proudly for a job well done. Darrel Whitcomb Author - The Rescue of Bat 21 To be published, Spring, 1998 by the Naval Institute Press. He can be contacted at: nail\_25@aol.com

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<http://www.flyarmy.org/incident/72040610.HTM>

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