

First Navy Helo Rescue – 9-20-1965 N. Vietnam

While making a bomb run on a bridge at Dao Nung in an A4 Skyhawk Lt. John R. Harris of VA-72 suffered battle damage from ground fire. His aircraft caught fire finally burning thru the tail section, which broke away from the aircraft as he ejected 35 miles from the sea.

Lt Harris was rescued by a daring H2 crew flying from the cruiser USS Galveston. the helo crew was LCDR W. Wetzel and LTJG Ken Vendevelde of a HC-1 Det A. Which had been positioned forward to the Cruiser. The helo was escorted by the Skyraiders from VA-25 off the USS Midway.

This was the very first overland rescue by a navy helo in North Vietnam and the first anywhere in the southeast Asia theatre by a ship based helo. Lt Harris was the first American pilot to be shot down east of Hanoi an area which had been out of bounds to this point.

Note: these guys were flying unarmored UH2B's with no machine guns only BAR.s , Tommy guns, grease guns etc. how id they get involved stayed tuned for the exciting story of how did the come up with the idea of H2 Dets anyway. Comments anybody???

John Birch

Correction of rescue

Lt Harris was from VA-72 flying off the USS Independence , the 2 A1 Skyraiders which escorted Clem in were from VA-25 from the USS Midway and I had known who the enlisted crewmembers were I would have listed them so when I tell a story and the crew is not listed that means I have exhausted my means to identify the enlisted crew members why the Navy decided must not have been important to the mission or they would have named them in the reports, enough said, Comments? jb