



The Best Job I Ever Had:

The following represents both previously compiled information and, since I was one of the guys on the ground, what I remember happened.

HC-1 SAR Det 15, Clementine Two, embarked on the USS Reeves (DLG-24) on South SAR was launched by the Harbor Master and then proceeded to the reported coordinates. The UH-2A was commanded by the PIC, LCDR Wade Pharis, CoPilot LTJG Sam Arundale and the enlisted crew of AT2 Anthony Hanson and AN Paul L Schwartz. The crew went “feet dry” knowing this was their detachment’s last duty flight day before they were scheduled to rotate from South SAR, head into Cubi Point, Philippines, and fly home to San Diego.

Dealing with conflicting reported survivor positions (differing by as much as 16 miles), primitive navigation equipment, and while receiving ground fire, Clementine Two was at first unable to find the survivor’s location. That was my first visual experience of AAA fire. LCD Pharis had just announced he was turning back to feet wet when MAJ Stone’s wingman (Lt Gordon Jenkins) returned to the ejection site and heard Clementine Two’s RTB declaration. By using afterburner, he went to the helo’s position to guide the helo to MAJ Stone’s position. The F105 pilot dirtied up his aircraft to half flaps, slowing down and S-turning in front of the helo to lead us back to MAJ Stone’s downed location. The route took us away from ‘Route Package 1’ and its AAA into a more remote area where MAJ Stone’s chute was visible in the top of the trees. After we declared ‘survivor sited,’ the F105 wingman climbed overhead to watch and provide sitreps about the property owners to rescap controllers.

We entered a hover about tree canopy height (~200 ft AGL) and tried to stabilize the hover as close as possible to the chute and MAJ Stone’s position in the trees. We observed him

to be non-responsive to the helo noise and not moving at all. His body slumped in the parachute harness; we really did not know if he was dead or alive. We did try to swing the hoist over to him and did manage to get close several times but he did not move or indicate he would grab it if it did get close to him. We concluded he was unconscious and determined that he probably was unable to help himself because he never looked or gave any signal to us. It was obvious that someone had to go get him. The high hover we were in was not sustainable considering heat, obstructions, and altitude. It was decided to locate an area that allowed a lower hover preferably, a clearing in the forest.

The next time I saw MAJ Stone he was on the ground and the canopy of his chute was hanging in the lower limbs of the tree above him. I don't know if MAJ Stone lowered himself to the ground on a rope or whether we blew him and his chute out of the tree with our rotor wash.

I am not sure how the clearing (opening in the trees) was located (intuitively or by sheer luck) nor do I remember the aircrew conversation that went on before we got there, but I knew that I was the one to go. The opening we found was about 100 to 200 yards from MAJ Stone's tree and allowed the helo to descend into it for a lower hover. Once we were in a hover all we could see on the ground was bushes. I took an M-16 with me, climbed on the jungle penetrator, and the rescue started.

We established a hover ~100-150 feet AGL for my descent. I guess, because of the dense bushes, I halfway disappeared into them, when Paul stopped the hoist. It was still approximately 10 feet about the ground. I dropped off the hoist and disappeared into the undergrowth. I quickly found out how 'brer rabbit' felt because the bushes were a combination of bamboo and thorny vines sporting thorns about as long as what appeared to be my thumb. I heard the helo leave the clearing and head back to the rescue site (Maj. Stone's tree).

After the thorny vines got my attention, the next thing I noticed was how quiet it was. I knew my crew would meet me back at the clearing and we would get back aboard the helo someday, however, I did start wondering how in the hell were they going to get a visual on us because the bushes at the clearing were way over my head, however the immediate problem was to get to Maj Stone ASAP.

I knew MAJ Stone was uphill from me and the general direction to go once I made it to the edge of or the attached chute but I could hear the helo in front of me and up the hill. The helos rotor sound would guide me to where MAJ Stone's tree was located so I headed in that direction. I could see the chute before I saw MAJ Stone or the helicopter. Not really knowing his state of consciousness, I then started worrying that he just might mistake me for one of the property owners. So I innovated and varied my approach technique—and I started communicating as only an American Sailor can, swear words—loud and often—. It worked. He did not shoot at me. As I worked my way closer to the helo, the tree, the chute and MAJ Stone, I could see that he was slumped over at the bottom of the tree with the chute caught in branches above him and still attached to the harness and chute. At first contact MAJ Stone's was non-responsive to my efforts to get his attention (swearing), physical contact, or presence. However, after a few minutes, he started moving and talking a little. I asked him what his injuries were, what his name was, and discussed our current position status—which was not very damn good.

Once I realized he was back in the game, I told him what we had to do to get the hell out of Dodge. I explained the helo could not pick us up at this location because of the helicopter's hover limitations and that we had to travel down the hill some distance. MAJ Stone's reply was "let's get the hell out of here." I quickly started itemizing his conditions, the terrain and the status we were in. I did not know how close the other guys were. I explained that I would have to drag him down hill to the recovery site. Time was of the essence and that I could not carry him because the type of terrain bushes, logs, trees down—old growth forest—we were in. I told him I was going to immobilize him in as streamline and tight a bundle as I could and that it was probably going to hurt like hell when we started moving. I knew the best I could do for him was to immobilize his injuries (broken bones) before moving him.

I then removed his parachute, cut a bunch of parachute cord, and started tightly wrapping him up. I told him we were ready to go but I do not remember if he replied. I think that he became unconscious during this process because I do not remember being gentle and was in a hurry. I then grabbed his parachute harness and started dragging him headfirst down hill. During the journey down, whenever I came to a fallen log and we could run or step over it I did and slid him over it. A downed tree was too big to slide him under and stopped us cold so I dropped his head, grabbed his feet, and threw them over the tree and then grabbed his harness again and proceed on down the hill. I recall that we had to go through a lot of underbrush consisting of more bamboo and thorny vines so he went under or through them—whatever worked. In the meantime the helo headed back to the clearing. I thought that several times during our ground travels I could hear gun reports and rounds flying overhead and in the bushes, which did increase my ground travel speed.

Meanwhile the helo had returned to the drop off area, assumed a high hover again (~150 ft AGL) and providing a noise source to head to. When we arrived at the clearing, I could hear the helo but could not see it. I knew that if I could not see the helo he could not see us. Paul was operating the hoist and I later learned that he had most of the hoist cable out and was swinging the hook through the tops of the bushes in hopes that we could see or grab it because he could not see me. I do not think they were even sure if we were at the clearing until Paul observed that the cable had quit swinging. All of a sudden, the hook was in front of me so I grabbed it and hooked us up. Paul later told me that when they got back to the pick-up site all the time they helo was in a hover the only time he recognized something was when one of my hands appeared in the bushes. After hooking ourselves up, I tried to signal Paul with a 'thumbs up' a universal signal for 'get our asses of here'. I told MAJ Stone that we were all going out or we were all going to get to spend the rest of the war here and I do not remember if he answered. All of a sudden we were airborne and heading towards that beautiful noise of rotating parts—this was definitely the best cable ride back up I ever had.

During the return trip to the Reeves, MAJ Stone kept trying to go into shock. Paul and I both worked to prevent that. It was later determined that MAJ Stone had over 20 fractures.

The Crew of Clementine Two did the job we were trained to do. Nothing more nothing less.

Many years later I managed to find out where he was living in Alabama as was I, after several phone calls we made arrangements to meet and we have managed to stay in touch.

ATC Paul Schwartz later in his career died (November 1981, in an H-46 crash during a night vertrep off the coast of Southern California.

Finally “Being a SAR crewman was the best dam job I have ever had during my 68 years of life.”

AT-2 Anthony Hanson will received his CAW in Charleston, South Carolina in May of 2010 at a past due awards ceremony.