

*This is a verbatim extract from Matthew D. Kirkpatrick's web site, which is at <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Base/6850/>. His son Joe has given permission to use this information and the pictures that are on his Dad's web site.*

## The TRAP!!

I've been reading all this email about the Porters (my son informed me that it is in reality a Dornier Do-27) and even though I don't know anything about the airplane, I remember that usually when the Pony Express had an exfield or infield of Hmong troops in Laos, the Air America crew in a Porter led the way. I remember many missions that they led us into the LZ, but the one that needs to be explained is the one in 69 which we later called the TRAP. The 21st SOS and the remains of the 20th SOS at Udorn were called upon for a massive infiltration of Hmong troops into an area north of Pakse. I was on the mission, but my memory is rather vague about it. We landed in a Lima site near the Bolovens plateau and picked up our teams of Laotian soldiers. We took off, headed north, to who knows where, and was led by an Air America Porter. The Porter had an air America pilot and a Hmong interpreter in the craft, and they led us to the LZ. As a rule the Air America Porter pilot was supposed to get a colored flare and voice communication with the troops below. As we arrived to our destination, the AM pilot called for the predetermined colored flare and got it, but when the Hmong passenger in the Porter tried to get voice communication, no one answered. He called several times, but there was no reply. The Air America pilot said something was wrong with the radio and assured us that the place was safe as he had landed there or been in the area a few days before. He told us to go ahead and land and drop our troops. The 21st SOS was leading the mission and LtCol Silva was the Copilot on the lead helicopter. They made their approach and as they came into a hover to land, they were hit by many rounds of small arms fire and crash landed on the ground without killing anyone. The crew and Silva jumped out of the helicopter and ran for a few ditches around the LZ. When this happened an emergency was declared and the rest of us kept circling the LZ waiting to drop our troops if necessary.

The A-1s shot up the area and as it seemed quiet, the AM pilot told us to get more troops on the ground to help the others and perhaps better protect the area. So, the second helicopter tried to land with more troops. As he came into a hover he also received small arms fire and was forced to crash land. When this happened, we

were told to go to a near by Lima site near the Mekong and await further instructions and to keep listening on our radios to keep track of what was going on. This we did. On the radio we heard that Rescue helicopters were called in to help rescue the two downed crews and Hmong tribesmen. Also, as it was an emergency broadcast to all in the area, I remember hearing that there were a few Navy fighters in the area who volunteered to come and help. They had a few rockets or bombs that would be glad to drop in our area. This they did. The bombing, shooting by A-1s etc. lasted a long time and as darkness was approaching, it was feared that we could not get the crews and Hmong out before dark. The rescue helicopters, HH-53s arrived so they decided to drop sleeping gas?? or whatever you call it in the area to hopefully put the bad guys to sleep while they rescued the downed crews. I remember hearing that as the rescue chopper was on the final approach, some enemy troops were running down the road trying to escape the sprayed gas and the rescue chopper unloaded its mini guns and shot at any thing that moved down the road. Obviously, it worked and the helicopter successfully landed and picked up many of the crew and Hmong. However, as soon as he broke ground with his load, a voice was heard over the radio saying in essence that they had left a "round eye" down there. The Pilot of the second helicopter that landed, after the first one was crippled, was quite a ways away from the landing zone of the first rescue helicopter. When this call was made, another rescue helicopter was sent into the zone to pick up this other crew, so everyone was saved. Col. Silva was quite large in the chest, and as he lay hidden in a gully, his back was exposed above ground, so he ended up with a bullet hole in the fatty part of his back. A couple of Hmongs were wounded also and when it was all over just before dark, Silva and the two wounded Hmongs were transferred to the Udorn hospital. Those of us at the Lima site left out troops there and returned to Udorn and NKP when the two crews were picked up. Of course we lost two helicopters that day assigned to the 21st SOS at NKP, but if the Air America Pilot had stuck to the normal rule of a colored flare and voice communication, this fiasco would never have happened. The Ponies scratched many a mission when they did not get the radio response and the proper colored flare from the ground. Things changed pretty fast over there in Laos and even though the Pilot had been there a few days before, he should have realized that it could have been a trap - as it turned out to be!! Later that week, Col. Silva caused quite a stir as he and the two Hmong troops left the Udorn hospital without permission and marched over to the BX in their bath robes to buy a few things. Ha, ha! That's about it for me and mostly all I remember, however, I hope Bob Arnau and Phil Conran will jump in here to fill in the blanks that I missed. Phil was part of the mission and crewed the second helicopter that was hit and forced to crash land. Phil was wounded and returned to the states shortly there after. I've asked him before to send me his recollection about this Trap, but nothing from him so

far. I have some pictures of Silva, and Phil on the ground after they landed, but they take up too much space to send in this letter. If any of you would like to see the pictures let me know and I'll forward them to you. I'll eventually put this story on my web page with all the pictures, but will wait awhile to see if Bob or Phil adds to the story. Kirk (A PROUD PONY)

