

Air Force Helicopter Unit Re-Captures Record

By: Jim Burns

Each year the 5040th Helicopter Squadron was tasked to participate in a simulated rescue exercise of a civilian airliner that had made a crash landing on the ice cap North of Point Barrow, Alaska. I believe the mission that I'll be telling you about took place in late January or early February 1974. I remember it was late enough in the year that we had about an hour of daylight (more like twilight) during the mission. It took place on a very cold, about 20 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, clear day with a 10-15 knot wind blowing, which lowered the chill factor to well below the -20 Fahrenheit degree actual temperature. Remember these facts as they make the accomplishments by the individual who re-captured the record even more remarkable.

We flew two CH-3E's to the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory facilities near Point Barrow, Alaska, where we stayed and staged out of for the two or three days the exercise lasted.



Our mission was to deliver Pararescue and medical recovery teams to a location, about 125 miles North of Point Barrow, where the simulated crash landing of a civilian airliner had occurred on the ice cap. We were sent to determine the status of the passengers and crew and evacuate any survivors. I believe the Pararescue teams spent at least one night (maybe two) at the site as part of the exercise while the flight crews stayed at the Lab facilities in Point Barrow.

While at the lab we had a discussion over dinner and/or over some beers, with some of the Navy folks stationed there, about a particular record that a U.S. Navy submarine crew had claimed. The submarine had come up through the ice and surfaced about 100 miles North of Point Barrow, when they re-claimed the record. They were bragging and carrying on about how the Navy had re-captured this record from the Air Force, the previous Air Force claim belonging to a C-47 Gooney Bird crew. What with our Air Force pride being challenged and with the inner service rivalry coming into play, we could not let this stand. After our Navy host left our group, we begin to devise a plan to take this record back from the Navy. The Navy claimed the record breaking event took place at about 100 miles North of Point Barrow and since our exercise was taking place at about 125 miles we knew we had the distance Now we just needed some one with the will to volunteer to attempt the hazardous feat. A short discussion between both flight crews ensued and our plan was devised, with one of the brave and daring helicopter flight engineers volunteering to make the attempt to re-take the record from the Navy the next day.



The day of the record setting event, both CH-3E's proceeded toward the direction of the simulated crash site. But before we landed to pick up any passengers we made a slight diversion about 5-7 miles further North to make the record attempt. We landed on the arctic ice cap about 130 miles North of Point Barrow, Alaska, setting down about 75 yards apart. Shortly after landing, with rotors still turning, the record attempt began. The aft cargo ramp on one of the

choppers was lowered to the ice surface and down an out of the ramp (which immediately closed behind him....after all it was *cold* out there!) came the volunteer, running like crazy toward the other chopper. As he neared the second chopper, the aft cargo ramp on it was lowered to the ice surface and the volunteer scampered up the ramp, into the waiting chopper, with the ramp closing behind him. In this one brief minute (or two) the 5040th Helicopter Squadron could now claim the record back for the Air Force.

You may be asking just what the record was. Maybe this will clear up any questions you may have. When the individual made his dash between the two choppers, he was only dressed in combat boots and a ski mask; yep! You guessed it; we re-calmed the record for the farthest North “*streakier*” in history. By now you might be wondering, just who was the brave (*crazy*) flight engineer (it was *not me!*) who volunteered to accomplish this record. Sorry, I can't divulge his name as we were all sworn to secrecy about his identity.

Oh...by the way, I forgot to mention that the other flight engineer on this mission that day, along with me, was SSgt. John D. Reimer, Jr.

