

The shoot down of CH-3E's 62-12579 & 64-14222 6 OCT 69 at Muang Phine Laos.

The mission was to fly about 200 indigenous personnel into the small dirt landing strip at Muang Phine Laos. They were going to link up with about 200 more troops who were already in the area & proceed to the town of Tchepone about 15 miles to the north east for a battle.

As we prepared for the flight from NKP to the SGU camp to pick up the troops, everyone was saying that our part of the mission would be a piece of cake.

We had some time before we were to load the troops & depart the SGU camp. I went over to the building where some of the crew was & as I was about to go inside, one of the indigenous guys came out & as we passed he gave me a grin that made me feel just a little uncomfortable. He was not dressed as a good guy, I felt uneasy. After flying into this trap (the bad guys knew that we were coming). I often thought back to that moment & the grin.

We had about 10 choppers in the gaggle & I was on the door gun in the third CH-3E, I don't remember the rest of the crew. As we neared the landing strip Knife 61 made his approach & started to take hits from ground fire, the pilot came on the radio & said one engine was out & he couldn't maintain altitude & he had to go back into the landing strip.

I looked back at the troops & held up one finger then turned my hand upside down to indicate that #1 had been shot down, it got their attention. Someone came on the radio & said to get some more troops on the ground. Knife 62 started his approach & took hits but we never heard anything on the radio. I was leaning out of the door & told my pilot that 62's rotors were coasting down.

I looked back at the troops again & held up two fingers & indicated that #2 had gone down. They knew that we were #3 so their eyes were really wide open now. About that time someone came on the radio & said to back off until we find out what the bad guys had down there.

Things started to happen real fast now as it was declared a rescue & we returned to the SGU camp with the troops & the Jolly Greens were called in. The first Jolly was an HH-3E that took hits & had to abort & limp back to NKP. Two Jolly HH-53s finely got everyone out just before dark.

I never heard anyone say that any of our missions were a piece of cake again.

The CD that I made & sent to some of you is the last hour & a half of this rescue mission.

I hope that some of the others involved in this one can share some of their recollections.

Bill Crawford
21st SOS FE 1969/70