

Korean War Rescue Tales

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Rescuing personnel trapped behind enemy lines became a standing procedure for the first time during the Korean War. The 3d Air Rescue Squadron pioneered techniques and equipment to this end. At first they used a rescue version of the B-17 Flying Fortress--the SB-17--and the SA-16 flying boat. The addition of an H-5 helicopter detachment in July 1950 gave the squadron the ability to operate in mountains and rice paddies.

The first rescue of a pilot from behind enemy lines came on September 4. Protected by fighter aircraft, Lieutenant Paul W. Van Boven flew his H-5 from Pusan to Hanggan-dong to retrieve Captain Robert E. Wayne.

By 10 October, United Nation Command advances had enabled the 3d's helicopter detachment to relocate further north, in Seoul. It was from this location on that day that Lieutenant David C. McDaniels and "paradoctor" Captain John C. Shumate made a 250-mile round trip to save a wounded British Navy flier, Lieutenant Stan W. Leonar, from under enemy fire at Changjon.

By November, continued UN successes had opened new operations centers further north. One H-5 crew plucked a downed pilot from Kanggye, 23 miles from the Chinese border. Such northerly missions ended with the entry of China into the war. The Asian giant sent hundreds of thousands of its soldiers across the Yalu River--driving UN forces back down the Korean peninsula.

The helicopter pilots continued their important service in the seesaw war. On 15 February 1951 when elements of the US 2d Division were surrounded at Chipyeong-ni, six H-5s delivered blankets, blood plasma, and medical supplies and took out the most serious casualties, each helicopter making three trips that afternoon. The

next day four H-5s weathered a 40-knot wind and a blinding snowstorm to evacuate 22 soldiers, bringing the two-day total to 52 evacuees.

In March, two YH-19s--test models of a larger helicopter--were added to the rescue squadron's fleet. They quickly joined the war effort to help evacuate wounded and injured paratroopers from the Munsan-ni drop zone. In this operation, on 24 and 25 March, the 3d's helicopters flew 77 sorties to evacuate 148 paratroopers in spite of intense mortar and small-arms fire.

Heroics were not confined to the versatile rotary wings. On 11 June 1951, Capt Kenneth Stewart parachuted from his flak-damaged P-51 Mustang too far behind enemy lines for rescue by helicopter. SA-16s were routinely dispatched from strip alert to recover pilots who went down off Korea's coast, but Captain Stewart was well inland. The captain did manage to place himself on a body of water--the shallow, debris-filled

Taedong River. So Lieutenant John J. Najarian flew his SA-16 north in an attempt to save the downed pilot.

The sun had set, and the descending darkness was hiding sandbars and snags. An additional hazard, low-hanging high tension wires, had already become invisible in the dim light. Meanwhile, Communist gunners

waited on both banks for new victims of their anti-aircraft artillery.

But the gunners themselves became targets as covering flights of Mustangs strafed their positions. Alert to the high-tension hazard, the P-51 pilots illuminated the wires with their landing lights for the SA-16. Lieutenant Najarian carefully put his amphibious craft onto the muddy water and rescued Captain Stewart--adding another story to the list of rescues that would grow long by war's end.

