

Introduction

The following narrative is a true account of an incident that occurred on April 6, 1966 while I, Larry Richard Johnson, was serving in the United States Armed Forces in the Republic of Vietnam. Interest in the Vietnam war and in particular this one unique experience among family members, friends and others made me realize that it should be documented. For years it was simply a series of mental images and how long would that last? Twelve years later I began to write with a memory dimmed by the passage of time. The hand written notes were set aside to collect dust for another eight years. Finally after nearly 23 years some stimulus prompted me to complete the project which I did or so I thought! Subsequent acquisition of several declassified military documents and contact with a few key individuals made several revisions necessary and appropriate. The primary intent was and still is to include it in my personal history and the Johnson family records. I hope that it will be of interest to them and strengthen their faith, testimonies, and our family ties.

Mrs. William C. Dawson, of Mer Rouge, Louisiana, sister of Captain James W. Gates who was shot down on April 6, 1966 and listed as MIA first contacted me in early August 1966 seeking information about her brother who she raised as a son. At that time the information was classified. A second appeal, much to my surprise, was made on January 29, 1973. Although there was still some question as to the classification of the information, in spite of the seven year lapse of time, compassion for their family feelings overrode any fear of retribution. I responded with as much detail as possible including some maps of the area.

Mr. Tim Nash, of Thorntown, Indiana, is the brother of Captain John M. Nash, a member of my unit, who was shot down on March 15, 1966 and listed as MIA. Tim first contacted me in the Fall of 1984 and we shared whatever information we had. Tim researched the records at the MAC archives in Illinois. Most of the documentation I have is a result of his patient efforts. One of the key documents was a copy of the "Narrative of Rescue Mission", an after-action report filed by the crew of Jolly Green 54, which gives their version of the action. That report lists the names of the eight crewman aboard the two rescue helicopters.

John F. Guilmartin Jr. of Columbus, Ohio, now Dr. Guilmartin, a professor of military history at Ohio State University, was the Co-Pilot aboard the "Jolly Green Giant" rescue helicopter that picked us up. Upon receipt of his address and telephone number, contact was made. John had told me that at one point the rescue crew commander had considered aborting the mission. The helicopter had been hit several times and they were getting low on fuel and

daylight was fading. John managed to "persuade" him to remain just a little longer and make one final pass during which time we were located and picked up.

Major Harry E. Duensing, captain at the time, was the pilot of our OV-1A Mohawk, tail number 63-13116. After being hit by ground fire he did everything possible to keep the aircraft airborne as long as possible and I credit his actions with our safe recovery by performing so well while under the unexpected stress. Over the years I have lost contact with him. He, of course, would not need a copy of this narrative.

Last, but certainly not least, is Jesse M. Couch, one of the two O-1E or FAC pilots crisscrossing the valley looking for us. It was Jesse who first spotted us and eventually guided Jolly Green 54 to our location. Jesse and a Captain Frederick had been dispatched from Khe Sanh to participate in the rescue efforts. After the incident one of our officers flew from Phu Bai to Khe Sanh and interviewed Captain Couch. I had assumed that I would never know who these men were until I acquired a written copy of that interview. Jesse now manages a trailer court in Alamogordo, New Mexico and we remain in contact to this day.

Years later John or "Joe" and Jesse or "Jack" would both tell me "hey, just doing my job"! Doing their job meant flying low and oh so slow and sometimes hovering motionless just above the treetops dodging bullets and sometimes not dodging them. If that is not heroism then you tell me what is! Now for the account which, with a little amusement and/or sarcasm, I shall title

"THE TOSS OF A COIN"

It was a hot and humid April afternoon at the Hue Phu Bai airfield as usual. With no reconnaissance missions scheduled and no other routine duties pressing at the moment, the most desirable place to be was in our air-conditioned equipment maintenance van. The quiet and cool setting was abruptly ended when one of our pilots opened the door and said they needed a T.O. (Technical Observer) for an unscheduled mission. I glanced up but didn't recognize him. I suspect it was John W. Lafayette who was temporarily assigned to our unit. Our policy had been to rotate these flights among the six or seven observers assigned to the I.R. (Infrared) group. We flew when assigned, of course, but with our lives on the line every time we did it was not something that we would volunteer to do. So, whose turn was it? At the time there were three of us in the van, myself, SP-4 Larry R. Johnson, SP-4 Thomas A Underhill, and SP-5 Kenneth R. Wood who out-ranked both of

us. A brief discussion and mild disagreement between Tom and I must have irritated Sergeant Wood. He looked over at us and, more or less, said "Johnson, toss a coin and call it". "Heads," I said, while the coin was in the air, and after a few bounces and a wobbly roll on the floor, tails it was! What a simple act it was but how dramatic and life threatening would soon be the consequences!

I put on my flight suit and borrowed Tom's 45 and headed for the tarmac. Captain James W. Gates was already aboard Spud 6, one of the two OV-1A Mohawk surveillance aircraft participating in the mission. I approached the aircraft and asked who I would be going with and he answered, through the open window, that I was to accompany Captain Harry E. Duensing in the other aircraft, call sign Spud 5. A Mohawk crew consists of two people, a pilot and an observer.

We boarded our twin engine turbo-prop aircraft and strapped ourselves to the ejection seats, explosive catapult systems capable of sending the seat and occupant about ninety feet in the air in a second or two. The unpadded seat, parachute harness, waist strap, leg restraint straps, flack vest, helmet, belt and 45 caliber pistol, and pockets stuffed with radios, maps, and other survival paraphernalia were designed for safety but certainly not for comfort. Flying at around 150 to 200 knots, sometimes at tree top level with some beautiful scenery and the feeling of freedom of flight, tended to compensate for the lack of comfort. One last step before takeoff, normally, was to arm the seats, which is accomplished by engaging two toggle switches located beneath the seat and above the headrest respectively. A combined nervous and comfortable feeling it is, nervous in that it's like riding in a rifle barrel hoping the trigger isn't pulled, and comfortable knowing there is a way out.

At 1540 hours (3:40 p.m.) both aircraft took off on a visual and photo mission and headed West for a routine trip "across the fence," a phrase we used because of security and politics to mean across the border into Laos. Today's mission would be in the Tiger Hound area of operations which included sections of the Ho Chi Minh trail system in the Southern Laotian panhandle. The general area was where Laos, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam meet. It was common for us to fly North to Highway 9 and then follow the road West across the border to Sepone, an important road and trail junction. Part of the mission on this particular day was to search a couple of valleys about thirty miles South of said Sepone in the vicinity of the village of Mouang Nong in the West valley. About fifteen miles Southeast is another valley that has a village called Ban La Hop. At the time those villages were merely a few grass huts here and there. With the aircraft constantly changing directions I found it difficult to correlate what I was seeing on the ground with features on my map. To the West I could see a

peculiar confluence of rivers that looked like a huge "H" and in the far distance to the East was the mountain range at the border.

It was now 1655 hours (4:55 p.m.), one hour and fifteen minutes into the flight and we had been focusing on these two valleys. Flying now from West to East we approached, for at least the second time, a wide and somewhat shallow mountain pass separating the two valleys. Captain Duensing and I were in the lead aircraft and had just reached the apex, our altitude having decreased to about four or five hundred feet, when we heard a loud snap directly beneath us, as if someone had drawn a huge rubber band against the metal skin and let go. A small puff of smoke curled up between us and a second or two later the aircraft began to shudder and vibrate slightly. Captain Duensing radioed our sister ship and said, "we're hit," followed by Captain Gate's response, "Ya, Harry, you're on fire," and "we're hit"!

Our aircraft had taken at least two nonexplosive rounds from what was later determined to be a 12.47 mm or .50 caliber equivalent anti-aircraft machine gun. A second round had hit our left engine causing the fire and subsequent vibration. After extinguishing the fire, by a CO2 discharge, immediate action was taken to compensate for the power loss. Maximum RPM and prop pitch were applied to the right engine. It seemed to throb or pulsate. Next, the reserve wing fuel tanks were jettisoned. I happened to glance out the window just as the right tank "peeled" away from the wing. Unlike the "B" and "C" models which carry the side-looking-airborne-radar (SLAR) and infrared (I.R.) controls respectively on the observer side (right), the "A" model has a dual stick control. The stick had been drawn back and to the right and was vibrating against my right leg. All trim, aileron, and rudder controls had been adjusted which resulted in a temporary smooth and level flight attitude. Even so, I began mentally and physically to prepare for a certain command word that I felt would soon be given. It must have been an aileron cable or rod severed by the fire or other hits that caused us to experience a sudden roll to the left. "Mayday, Mayday," yelled the captain on the radio and then shouted "Go"! With an estimated five seconds before impact you don't have time to think, you act! I raised both arms and pulled a large plastic ring, located above the headrest, forward and then down. This action shields the face with a screen and fires the seat charges. Suddenly the "lights" went out! Now you may think that the time lapse between the "snap" and the "go" was of considerable duration but I doubt it was much more than say thirty seconds, if even that long. I've always felt that the difference between rescue and capture was that precious few seconds of flight time which allowed us to put some distance between us and the enemy.

The cool air blowing in my face ended the blackout caused by

the jolt and the acceleration force of the ejection. I believe the manual says there is an initial twenty "G" force exerted on the body, i.e., for a split second, body weight would be about twenty times normal in order to overcome inertia. Just how my strapped on helmet came off without my head still in it I'll never know. Perhaps the shroud lines took it off when the main parachute deployed but that is not too likely. Awake, but in a stunned, semi-conscious state, I glanced to the left and saw a large column of black smoke ascending from the crash site. The mountains in the distance appeared to be rising giving me the first awareness of descent. Better think about landing, I thought, but when I looked down all I could see was the tops of some trees "coming up" at me. I'm not sure whether I blacked out again or simply closed my eyes to avoid any danger or distress, probably the latter. There was no awareness of any contact with tree limbs or a sudden stop. Upon opening my eyes, I found myself suspended from a tree, at a slight angle and I could just touch the ground with my right foot. I reached up, released the two clips holding the parachute to the harness, and turned around to see Captain Duensing about thirty or forty feet away doing the same. Considering the nonsimultaneous ejection and the difference in our weight, to have landed so close to each other has got to be totally against logic and expectation. Years later Captain Duensing told me that he had seen me briefly during the descent but had made no attempt to coordinate our landing. Had we landed even a few hundred feet apart the chance of finding each other would have been slim and that would have greatly complicated rescue efforts.

Our brief "well, now what do we do" conference was quickly ended by the sound of two or three shots in the distance followed by the shouting of a couple of one syllable words sounding like "Ho", "Ho"! If fantasy had existed momentarily, it was certainly replaced by reality. I chambered a round in my 45 which I had never fired and hoped it would not be necessary to do so. We proceeded in a northeasterly direction, opposite to the direction of the sounds, as fast as we could which didn't exactly break any land speed records due to an extremely dense growth of shrubs, trees, and worst of all, tangling vines. At the same time caution, quietness, and frequent stops to rest and listen were necessary due to an almost certain pursuit by the enemy who would have no difficulty in locating the crash site and our parachutes. After a few minutes I suggested that we discard our flack vests because of their weight, the heat, and the poor maneuverability through the vegetation. We buried the vests and leg straps under some leaves for trail concealment purposes. I doubt we had gone more than a quarter of a mile when we happened to stumble, literally, into a small clearing perhaps twenty feet in diameter with a small shrub or two in the center. At least it was an area where we could see more than a few feet in any direction. Thirst, fatigue, and pain must have convinced us that this was the place to call home and so

it was for the duration. Any further movement would be pointless and dangerous with the enemy in the vicinity.

Suddenly there was absolutely nothing to do but wait and listen and to try to establish radio communication. Tension, apprehension, biting flies, and, perhaps worst of all, the heavy weight of silence became unwelcome guests. By now the effects of the ejection had begun to set in, namely, dull aches in our backs, necks, and legs. "Well, at least Captain Gates knows where we are," I said, desperately seeking something positive. "Well, they're down too," was the totally unexpected response! I'm not sure just when Captain Duensing became aware of that situation. He either heard something on the aircraft radio before the ejection that I didn't hear or something he heard on his two-way emergency radio that he was now monitoring. I had been asked not to turn mine on in order to conserve battery power. Contrary to our situation, their ejection occurred right after being hit which was like going from the frying pan to the fire, i.e., from a disabled aircraft right into the laps of those who did the disabling.

At this point a realistic assessment of the situation made things look bleak. We were some sixty to seventy miles from the nearest possible friendly force in rugged, densely vegetated terrain, having no food or water, in the middle of an area well known as a hot bed of enemy activity, suffering from severe compression sprains, and with zero survival training, at least on my part. To have walked out and avoided capture would have been highly improbable. Captain Duensing had laid down at the edge of the clearing with visible pain in his back and right leg. He called me over and said, "Can you see anything?", referring to the back of his leg. I couldn't see any problem but it was determined later that he had been hit by a small piece of shrapnel. Terribly alone, I sought the only source of comfort and power that I knew could possibly deliver us from almost certain destruction. I laid down by that small bush and offered a short but, needless to say, most humble and sincere prayer. "Father in heaven, if I have ever needed you in my life, I need you now, please help us."

Our two-way radios had a range of only about five miles and operated on an emergency frequency. The first attempt at establishing contact was with a large aircraft flying at a very high altitude but it apparently failed. I was informed now and then of pertinent conversations and information as it became available.

The acquisition of the aforementioned documents answered questions that had existed for many years. First of all, how did anybody know we were in trouble and where do you start looking? An extract from a unit report titled "Combat loss of Aircraft OV-1A 63-13116 and 63-13117" reads as follows: At approximately 1655

Hillsboro received the following radio call. "Mayday, Mayday both Spud 5 and 6". No further radio transmissions were received from either aircraft. Hillsboro directed Forward Air Control aircraft Hound Dog 51 and 53, to conduct a search for the downed aircraft. Hillsboro was an airborne C-130 communication center. In a SAR (Search and Rescue) log sent to me from Hawaii it states that Hillsboro reported a beeper located at 10 degrees/42 miles from channel 72. At least they had a starting point for the search at approximate 16°18'N and 106° 37'E where we were hit or map coordinates XD 750 030. The coordinates of the crash site were about 16°15'25"N and 106°43'40"E. Regardless of who, where, why, or what, our valley soon became a beehive of activity.

No less beautiful than an angel from heaven was the sight and sound of that little O-1E Forward Air Controller here and after called "Hound Dog". He circled a few times very low until finally he passed close enough to our little clearing to see my waving arms. He was close enough for me to see him smile and wave back! He left our area as quickly as he came, for the time being, presumably to look for Captain Gates and Captain Lafayette. As comforting as that was, rescue, as you will see, was almost not to be.

Time, how unbelievably slow it can pass. News that the rescue helicopters were about twenty minutes away was comforting at first but soon turned into an agonizing watch monitoring nightmare. I discovered that staring at a watch can definitely slow it down, yes, almost bring it to a complete stop! A few weeks earlier I had purchased a watch, an Omega Seamaster, while on "R & R" in Hong Kong. I still have the watch.

The tempo of key events quickly increased starting with the near simultaneous arrival of additional aircraft types including Jolly Green Giant helicopters, prop driven Skyraiders, and at least one Phantom jet fighter. Memory, dimmed by the initial twelve years delay in writing, recalls with at least reasonable accuracy of chronology said events starting with a frustrating problem with radio communication. The triangle that should have existed between Hound Dog, Jolly Green, and us, was missing one link. Jolly Green's UHF radio was inoperative, meaning that we could not talk directly to him or vice versa therefore Hound Dog had to direct Jolly Green 54 to our location. Now there were two little problems with this. First, Hound Dog was a fixed wing aircraft and could not hover above us and, second, ground fire was being picked up all over the valley requiring evasive maneuvers at times.

With Jolly Green 54 now in the vicinity, Hound Dog returned to our clearing, opened his window, and threw out a smoke marker close to our clearing. "Oh boy, now everybody knows where we are, they had better get us soon," commented Captain Duensing. Jolly Green's

first pass in response to the smoke marker was to the side of us and he stopped too far away to be able to see us. About that time one of the Skyraiders (Sandy) made a dive at a nearby enemy position. It came in at a shallow angle and disappeared below the tree line. Just as it came back into view and was rising two cylindrical objects were dropped. The shape and tumbling motion led me to believe that the ordinance was napalm canisters which was later confirmed. I couldn't see them hit but heard them explode. Shortly after this a jet fighter made a low-level pass, in the same general area as the Skyraider, and cut loose with a high speed mini-gun or cannon. It reminded me of someone quickly running their finger along the teeth of a comb. The enemy was headed in our direction so hopefully this action stopped or at least slowed them down.

The crew of Spud 6 had ejected safely but must have been quickly surrounded. Their last known radio transmission at approximately 1900 hours was "Please hurry. My God, they are all around us, bring air power". Captain Duensing reported hearing this radio communication from Captains Gates and Lafayette probably to Jolly Green 55, or one of the two Hound Dogs. With great intensity I watched and listened with millions of others as the first releases from Hanoi were made hoping to see their names and faces. Declassified documents allege that they were shot and buried by PAVN forces within an hour of their ejection while trying to defend themselves and, at the same time, trying to escape. Hopes of at least a POW status are now gone.

Once again, Hound Dog returned and dropped a second smoke marker out of his window. Response to this action was most alarming. First, Jolly Green again passed to one side and overshot us, and second, we heard a four or five round "burst" probably from an AK-47. Years later Joe Guilmartin told me where all five rounds had hit the helicopter. He also said that he had his side window open and he felt the muzzle blasts on his cheek! Whoever fired that weapon couldn't have been more than a few hundred meters from us. My 45, which by now had become a permanent extension of my right arm, was raised to the level, as was Captain Duensing's, and aimed in the direction of the shots. For a few moments we stood in silence thinking, "Well, this is it," and fully expecting unwanted company which, gratefully, never arrived. The dense growth was now our best friend and defense. However, you may imagine what this knowledge did to the tension.

Dusk was just beginning to set when Jolly Green 54 returned a third time to our area. Again they were off course and overshot us by one, maybe two hundred meters. This time, however, they stopped in the only position which, because of a "U" shaped break in the tree line, permitted a direct line of sight between us. Four frantically waving arms and voices silently yelling, "Over here,

over here," finally caught their attention and soon that beautiful machine was hovering about twenty-five feet directly overhead. They lowered a "pod" or rather a tree penetrator by cable. I ran a few feet, grabbed the cable, returned to the center of the clearing, and wrapped both legs around the pod. Rather than calling it panic, call it a case of overwhelming desire to, pardon me, get the hell out of there! Yielding to the captain's better judgement, we opened the pod and found a collapsible seat with a mess of straps which, given enough time and written instructions, may have been properly utilized. Again, with the same attitude and this time with the captain's directive, I repeated the initial action of wrapping my legs around the seat which, now deployed, was at least easier to hang on to.

An enemy within range of the helicopter probably would have opened fire at the first opportunity. The thought in mind, however, was if I were the enemy what would I do? Yes, I would wait until the evacuee was half way up then open fire on both. That short but very slow cable ride was the most tense part of the whole experience. Picture a worm on a hook at the end of the line dangling from a fishing pole being offered as bait. The clenched teeth and little or no breathing surely created a bullet proof barrier. As I neared the open door four arms literally yanked me aboard. The floor was slick with hydraulic fluid which was still leaking from a line that had been severed earlier by ground fire. "Oh no, not this one too," I thought. This was the target of that "burst." As soon as Captain Duensing was pulled aboard, we started to gain altitude. One of the crewmen stuck his M-16 out the open door and emptied a clip at the ground to keep heads down until sufficient altitude had been achieved. The door had come off the track and had to be jettisoned.

It was now 1104Z (6:04 p.m.). For two hours and nine minutes emotions and tensions had been unvented. It was not until a minute or two of flight had lapsed and safety was assured that the release occurred in the form of deep sighs and some tears. The noise of the engines drowned out attempts to talk to the crewmen so I pointed at Captain Duensing, who was laying down towards the rear of the helicopter, and at myself and raised two fingers. Again I raised two fingers then pointed out the door. A nod in the affirmative by one of the crewmen led me to believe that our two companions had also been picked up. Happiness, however, was soon turned to sorrow.

Twilight had faded into darkness as we approached the Nakhon Phanom Air Force Base air strip. Located in Thailand along the Mekong River, which separates Thailand from Laos, it was the origin of many rescue attempts. Landing was momentarily delayed until the crew had completed a manual deployment of the landing gear which had been rendered inoperative by that severed hydraulic line. We

were escorted to a vehicle and then taken to a nearby first-aid station for a physical examination including some X-rays. "Can I have a band aid?", I asked upon discovering a laceration on my leg just at the top of the boot line. The top of my sock was a little stiff from some dried blood. Not exactly a gaping wound, in my opinion, but it did get me three stitches and a Purple Heart which I received along with the Air Medal and "V" Device several months after my discharge. Time had not permitted us to jettison the canopy prior to ejection so I assume that a piece of the fractured Plexiglas had hit my leg.

"I think you're the first enlisted man we've ever picked up," said John F. Guilmartin to whom I responded with a smile and a thumbs up sign. All four crew members of Jolly Green 54 had stopped by the aid center for a brief visit. We had a minute or two to chat before the X-rays. When asked about our radios, I recall taking the battery pack and transmitter out of two of many pockets and connecting them for an intended demonstration which was instantly aborted. Any transmission would have been picked up and probably interpreted as somebody else in trouble. Concerning Captain Gates and Captain Lafayette, we were told that they were unable to locate them. An intended search for them the next day was cancelled due to poor weather.

By now the tranquilizer had started to take effect. In fact, I wondered if I was even going to make it from the X-ray table to the bed. The last mental image was being assisted onto a cot or a stretcher. When I awoke, sort of, I was lying on a stretcher in the reception area of a medical facility, not in Thailand, but at Clark Field in the Philippines, some one thousand miles away. A nurse was leaning over me and asked, "Specialist Johnson, what happened to you, do you know where you are?" "I had to eject from a Mohawk," I said, to which she responded to someone else in a puzzled tone of voice, "He had to eject from a Mohawk?" I have evidence that we had stopped at Udorn Thailand on the way but have absolutely no memory whatsoever what we did there. The brief moment of consciousness ended until the afternoon of the next day in bed, alone in a room.

Ejections usually result in severe compression sprains and sometimes ruptured or herniated disks. I guess that is why we were still undergoing tests. My neck and back didn't bother me nearly as much as the swelling and ache in both legs which now showed bruises and other discoloration caused by the impact of the ejection seat. In spite of this I felt a little bit like a "pansy" and when the coast was clear I would sneak out of bed to go to the bathroom even though I was told not to do so. Two days later we boarded a Hercules C-130, awake this time, and headed for the Camp Zama convalescent center in Japan for three weeks of rest and recuperation before returning to Viet Nam. Although declared ready

to resume previous duties, then and for several years afterwards, any excessive lifting, jumping, or long hikes would result in a dull ache in the small of my back and to a lesser degree in my neck.

Injuries to other unit members having similar experiences had been extensive enough to warrant being returned to the United States directly from the hospital for the rest of their tour. If I could have remained in Japan for one more week I would have met some deadline and would have been sent home. It was now May and my ETS (Estimated Time of Separation) was in July. Captain Duensing and I had a chance to visit now and then at Camp Zama. He told me that one of the well-known generals was aware of the dual shoot down and that the loss of the two Mohawks was enough to warrant a real plastering of the area a few days after the loss. He also pinpointed our location on a wall map. Quite frankly, trying to orient a map in a cockpit and operate a camera wasn't the easiest thing to do and it left me with only a general idea of where we were. Captain Duensing remained for an extra week before being returned to the unit.

Who would have guessed that the landing at the Phu Bai air field would have been nearly one month after the takeoff instead of the normal two to three hours? The short walk to the camp area was accompanied with mixed emotions and a tiny bit of apprehension as to the reception I would receive. Having been the first unit member shot down and then returned to the unit, there was considerable interest the moment I entered the camp and for a short while I was the center of attention.

Major Drexel E. Sanders called me into his office for a visit and a debriefing during which time he asked, "When you landed which way did you go and why?" After my explanation he explained that a study of reconnaissance photographs of the area had revealed numerous gun emplacements and evidence of enemy activity described as being like a pie with a narrow sector missing. Apparently we had landed in the center of the "pie" and had chosen to walk out via the missing sector. Finally came the question I knew for a month I probably would have to answer. While in the hospital the thought had crossed my mind several times of what I would have to do short of dishonor not to have to go through that experience again or something far worse! "What do you think about flying again?" Facial expressions and some tensing of muscles for a brief moment must have exposed true inner feelings more than words could have. Sensing this he smiled and said that unless I wanted to, he had no intention of putting me back in the air. If I were regular army or had just started the tour, I would have been expected to fly again, of course, but not with less than two months to go before my discharge. I was given the option of working on the flight line and maintaining our equipment. The whole unit seemed

sympathetic with that decision.

I think back from time to time at that "toss of a coin" now 45 years ago. Had that coin come up heads this story would still have taken place but one of the participants would be different. Having survived that experience I look at daily life with a profound appreciation. Terrible at the time it now has great value and meaning.

Those who have been associated with the Mohawk and its mission share a unique experience and identity almost like being a family. I consider it an honor to have served with the men and machines of that unique chapter of military and aviation history.

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