

# **The Rescue of Dustoff 65**

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For me, that was the rescue of Dustoff 65. It was a rainy, foggy night on April 3, 1968, when my platoon came under attack. A savage fire fight followed, which lasted most of the night. Two of the several men who got hit were critically wounded. We needed a medivac if their lives were to be saved. With no place to land a helicopter, it was necessary to use a device called a "jungle penetrator" to lift the injured men through the triple canopy jungle.

That was a dangerous mission as the aircraft needed to hover for several minutes as the evacuation took place. Pilots, First Lieutenants Mike Meyers and Ben Knisely, crew-chief James Richardson and medic Bruce Knipe of the 498th Medical Company accepted the assignment. At first light they headed for us.

Using radio contact, Meyers and Knisely got close and identified the purple smoke we had put out to help locate our position. Coming in at treetop level and just before they got to us they were hit by a North Vietnamese Army rocket, which blew away their tail section. They managed a controlled crash some distance away from us. We quickly put together a search party and set off to, at least, find and secure their bodies. With a little help from God, we might even find survivors.

Finally, we smelled smoke and knew we must be close. We were in a race with the enemy to get there first. The terrain was rugged and hostile. It took four hours, including a brief fire fight, but we were successful. We found three of the four crewmembers alive. The crew chief had been killed and it would be weeks before another unit is able to find and recover his body.

It took the rest of the day to move the injured back to our company's position, and another three days to secure an area suitable to carve out an LZ (landing zone) large enough for another medivac to land. It was three days of being constantly wet, covered with muck, eating cold C-rations, unable to sleep. We were unable to move to a more secure position due to the need to protect the wounded. We used plastic explosives to blow trees for an LZ. The hole we created in the jungle was barely large enough for the rescue helicopter and we marvelled at the skill and courage of that crew. Eventually we were all taken out to safety.

The entire mission took five days.

It is now difficult to explain those five days. They were not the most remarkable of my Vietnam tour. That mission won't be mentioned when great books of the era are written. Few will know the lousy food, lack of sleep, being scared or being brave. Most of the world will never know what happened on that mountain. The one thing that cannot be changed is that three brave men were saved because a band of mostly teenage soldiers persisted in a dangerous jungle search just to find them.

Editor's note: The medivac helicopter was UH-1H 66-17043 on 6 April 1968.