

Clouds Parting Over Pleiku

By CW2 [Bernardo S. Paez](#)

One night we had an incident that seemed directed by the hand of God.

One afternoon during the end of the Monsoon season, six "Blackjack" slicks, (A Co. 4th Avn Btn, 4th ID), were assembled at an airstrip west of the Oasis fire base. I want to say it was the Duc Co airstrip, but I can't remember. We were to insert a platoon sized force some place in the mountains southwest of Kontum. We sat to the side of the airstrip for hours waiting for the orders to go. We had six grunts sitting and waiting near and in our aircraft. We started getting apprehensive because it started getting late and were losing the light. Now that I think about it, we must have been waiting for Gunship cover, because we finally got the order to crank up and take off without Gunships. I imagine we were supposed to meet up with them near the LZ, I can't see any other reason for doing what we did. As far as that goes, I don't even remember any Command and Control aircraft going with us either.

The flight finally reached a large valley as it started getting dark. The Flight Leader directed us into a single file formation as we circled round and round above the large valley. Our aircraft was the third in line. Before we realized it, the clouds had built up all around us and we were trapped in the valley. I remember some one breaking radio silence to ask the flight leader for a mission abort. We waited for what seemed a long time, (but surely it was only a few minutes), before we got the word to abort the mission and that it was up to every man to find his way back to Camp Enari. By this time it had gotten dark, but luckily there was close to a full moon lighting up the clouds and night sky.

We had climbed as far as we could while circling inside the valley. I remember the flight leader disappearing into the clouds followed by the second in line about five seconds later. We closed the helicopter doors and prepared to go on instruments. I took a southeasterly heading and went into the clouds on instruments at a high rate of climb. I was praying we wouldn't run into a mountain or into another helicopter. We finally broke out of the clouds at about 9 thousand feet. It was a beautiful sight, from the sky around the moon, to blue, deep blue, purple, then black. A night sky lit up by the moon with a sea of white clouds below us.

We flew around for a while trying to find where we were. We could see nothing but clouds below us. There were no other aircraft in sight. (Later I found out that the rest of the flight had gone under the cloud cover).

We finally contacted Pleiku Air Force Base and asked them if they could pick us up on their radar. Pleiku asked us to squawk our transponder. We did and they placed us 19 miles south. They gave us a heading to Pleiku. We followed the ADF until the needle started turning in circles and we knew we were over the air base. We were running low on fuel and we decided to ask for a Ground Controlled Approach through the clouds. It was going to be pretty hairy because we were way out of practice and the clouds were

almost to the ground. I was scared and anxious. I knew we had to do something soon before we ran out of fuel.

All of a sudden the clouds parted in a circle below us. We could see the runway and the lights of Pleiku Air Force Base right below us. We didn't even ask for permission to land. We hurriedly circled in for a landing through the parted clouds. We were incredibly relieved to finally reach the ground. We asked the control tower to contact our airfield control and tell them where we were. We parked and tied down the aircraft. We looked up and the clouds had closed again. I remember being in confused but grateful wonder. Perhaps I had just witnessed a miracle.

The Air Force sent over a jeep for the pilots and a 2 1/2 ton truck for the enlisted men. I told everybody to meet at the aircraft next morning at 7 A.M. We were taken to the Officer's Club where we had a couple of beers and an excellent steak dinner. The enlisted men were taken to the Enlisted Club.

We slept in real beds with thick mattresses in the BOQ. That was a delight in itself as I was used to sleeping in a narrow cot with a leaky air mattress inside a sleeping bag. The next morning we took a hot shower, ate a great breakfast, and met the crew and grunts at the aircraft. You could see that the enlisted men had a great night also, especially the grunts. They had gone from spending the night in the jungle to having a great hot meal, with hot showers, and sleeping in nice beds. We then flew them, and us, back to the Division Base Camp and the war.