

Leave No Man Behind

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Chapter IV-15 HC-7 Sea Devils Navy '67-'68

As HC-7 was taking over the H-2 rescue business, HS-6 was returning for its second deployment and its advanced SAR detachment arrived the first day of October to begin the turnover, flying familiarization hops up to North SAR on 2 October with HS-2 aircraft commanders and first crewmen. It made sense for HC-7 to be in no hurry to assume the responsibilities of operating the SH-3A rescue aircraft; they had plenty to do standing up a new squadron and maintaining a combat readiness at the same time, enough challenge for anyone.

HS-6 was back in Westpac less than a year from the end of their first combat rescue deployment: they were moved up in the rotation because USS *Yorktown* was in an overhaul period, causing HS-4 to miss its turn. Because of the short turnaround, the squadron had a substantial number of pilots and aircrew returning for a second tour of duty. This marked the first time a relieving HS squadron had taken the SAR duty with a solid core of combat-experienced airmen. Five rescue-experienced pilots and five rescue-experienced aircrewmembers would end up making additional rescues during this second tour, their experience wisely distributed among nine different crews.

They eased into the mission with an easy overwater, unopposed, rescue. On October 9, 1967 Lieutenant Commander George Cagle kicked off the onstation period with the rescue of Lieutenant Junior Grade L.J. Cunningham of VA-164, whose A-4 gave up the ghost returning to USS *Oriskany*. Cunningham made it out several miles beyond Haiphong's outer harbor before jumping out and Cagle, Lieutenant Junior Grade Jerry Smith, his copilot, ADJ2 George L. Armstrong, and AXAN Alan K. Nobles made the rescue easily. (Smith and) Armstrong represented some corporate memory from the previous deployment, having made ... rescues ... overland and under hostile fire.