

Leave No Man Behind

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Part IV-9 Indian Summer Navy Late '66

As HS-4 wrapped up its successful learning experience, next in the box was HS-6. As their ship, USS *Kearsarge* made her brief stop in Pearl Harbor enroute to the western Pacific, the squadron sent ahead a Search and Rescue detachment, led by the squadron's Executive Officer, Commander Warren Lockwood. With nine other officers and 32 enlisted, and 5,000 pounds of tools and parts, they flew to NAS Cubi Point, the Philippines and from there were CODed aboard *Yorktown* July 1, 1966.

That day, two HS-4 birds flying up to North SAR for SAR duty, each carried an HS-6 pilot and crewmen for familiarization. Lieutenant Junior Grade Rick Grant and AX3 Gary W. Smith crewed with HS-4 HAC Lieutenant Reid Carleton to North SAR, where they participated in a futile SAR for Navy Commander Charles Henry Peters, commanding officer of VA-155, who had made a last-second low level ejection, trying to stretch his damaged A-4 to feet wet. He had gone down among the many small islands of the Fai Tsi Long Archipelago. As the rescue force searched hopefully for signs of a miracle, North Vietnamese gunners took the Big Mother under fire, with a round going through the helicopter's tail section. Hostile fire also hit the cockpit area of a 602nd ACS A-1 Sandy orbiting overhead the SAR scene. Major Robert Cyril Williams may have been incapacitated because he did not attempt to extract before the plane augured in immediately after being hit. The low and slow search for Peters found a helmet bag, pieces of a flight helmet, and plenty of additional aircraft debris, scattered among a large school of sharks; but no pilot. The sobering "fam" had underscored to Grant and Smith the message they would take back to the rest of the SAR det; that their new combat SAR mission was going to be a very serious business indeed.

After a very brief one-day turnover with HS-4, HS-6 took custody of four CSAR-configured helicopters, and flew them and the detachment's men and equipment to USS *Constellation* as *Yorktown* headed home. Once again, the hard-earned combat expertise and experience went with HS-4, leaving behind verbal passdown and lessons learned. Part of that passdown was the name Big Mother, passed along to HS-6 from HS-4 as they had received it originally from HS-2.