

To Whom It May Concern

AC-119 Stinger 41, 2 May 1972

Narrative of the events of the loss of Stinger 41, on 2 May 1972 as recorded by Lt Gen Tom Waskow USAF (Retired).

On 2 May 1972, I was a Forward Air Controller (FAC), callsign SUND OG 40, assigned to the 21st Tactical Air Support Squadron, SUND OG FAC, at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Republic of Vietnam. We flew the Cessna 0-2A, a close air support heavily modified Cessna 337. As a First Lieutenant, this was my first operational assignment following graduation from Undergraduate Pilot Training having volunteered for a combat assignment. At this point I was one of the most experienced FACS in the squadron having been assigned to forward operating locations at Phan Rang, Nha Trang and operations with the Special Operations Command at Ban Me Thuot East. Following the start of North Vietnam Army (NVA) invasion of South Vietnam during the Easter Offensive, I was deployed from Nha Trang to join the SUND OG FACS and provide air support in defense of the town of An Loc. I completed my combat tour in November 1972 having flown 282 combat sorties and completing 903 hours of combat flying. On 2 May 1972, I flew a 4.8-hour sortie (4.0-day VFR, 0.8-night VFR) in support of the STINGER 41 Search and Rescue (SAR).

The tempo in SUND OG operations on the morning of 2 May continued to increase as the NVA and Vietcong (VC) forces continued their siege of An Loc. The NVA's 5th, 7th and 9th infantry divisions supported by VC sappers and the 271st Anti-Aircraft Regiment totaling nearly 35,500 troops were committed to annihilate the 5,000 Army of Vietnam (ARVN) and Popular Forces (similar to our National Guard) forces. The NVA goal was to occupy An Loc, the provincial capital of Binh Long Province, by early May and continue down Highway 13 to capture Saigon by the end of the month. The fact that the NVA committed a full Air Defense regiment including track mounted 37mm, 23 mm, 14.7 mm and 51 caliber weapons to the fight was an acknowledgement that they were determined to succeed in their strategic goal. The ARVN forces supported by US Army advisor teams and American Airpower were determined not to let this happen.

That day, I was fragg ed to work the area East of Highway 13 from a line North of Hill 169 to a line just North of Quan Loi airfield. During my previous experience with Special Operations assets, I flew out of Quan Loi conducting insert operations in Cambodia, and my knowledge of the airfield compound (which had been overrun by the NVA) was critical to destroying the air defense units that the NVA had deployed there. As there was evidence that the NVA was repositioning infantry units to begin their final thrust into An Loc, our US Army advisors in An Loc needed us to focus on the eastern approaches to the city. During my Intelligence prebriefing, I was surprised to hear that the 18th Special Operations Squadron's AC-119Ks that were deployed to Bien Hoa, were going to continue to fly daylight combat sorties over An Loc in one of the most lethal anti-aircraft environments in South Vietnam. Having flown multiple missions in the vulnerable 0-2A, the SUND OG FACS had expressed concerns for the safety of the STINGER gunships and recommended that they be used after sunset only. For that day's mission, SUND OG 29, Capt. Tom

Milligan, was fragged to support STINGER 41 on a priority mission during the afternoon Time Over Target.

Takeoff, climb and enroute weapons check were all normal, and as I checked in with our controlling agency, III DASC (Direct Air Support Center) callsign PAWNEE TARGET, I was informed that STINGER 41 had checked in and was entering the target area with SUNDOG 29. Upon arriving on station, I checked in the US Army advisor (EXTRA 72) in An Loc and was told that there were US Army Cobra gunships from F Troop/ 9th Cavalry (Air) near Quan Loi and they would be working in the area. I noted that the density of anti-aircraft activity began to increase. The frequency of 37 mm AAA was increasing with airbursts near the STINGER orbit. With every orbit, the accuracy of the airbursts near the AC-119K was increasing until I observed a large explosion between the right reciprocal engine and the jet engine on the right wing. At that point the fire intensity increased sending flames well beyond the right tail boom. I immediately changed to SUNDDOG 29's frequency and simultaneously heard STINGER 41's MAYDAY calls on UHF Guard frequency. STINGER 41 had received a mortal blow.

Immediately, I coordinated with SUNDOG 29 and contacted PAWNEE TARGET to launch the SAR forces who were sitting alert at Bien Hoa. I then saw STINGER 41 begin to descend and begin a slow roll to the right followed by repeated attempts to level the wings. I noted an object that appeared to be the flare dispenser thrown out of the back of the aircraft followed by the first crewmember whose parachute opened quickly. Due to the prevailing western winds, the first crewmember, STINGER 41G, began to drift back toward Highway 13 and the concentrated location of enemy forces. There was a delay in the exit of the following crew members, and I identified 6 parachutes (although there were 7 survivors, I never saw the last crew member bail out he was so low.) STINGER 41 then began its final roll to the right and hit the ground at a 90 degree attitude followed by a large explosion at impact. At this point, SUNDOG 29 had descended to low altitude to locate the survivors and I turned my attention to STINGER 41G's slow parachute descent. I contacted PAWNEE TARGET and directed them to keep me posted on the progress of the SAR forces, and to scramble the alert A-37s from the 8th Special Operations Squadron at Bien Hoa. My concern was the history of NVA establishing Flack Traps to use downed airmen as bait for the ensuing SAR forces.

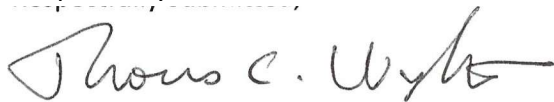
As STINGER 41G descended below the trees, I made note of his location and began to coordinate with EXTRA 72 to determine if there were any US Army aviation assets available to assist in the SAR pickups for the downed airmen. It was a race against time and I knew that we had to act quickly. He notified me that there was an Army UH-1, SHARKFISH 37, in the area and he gave me the contact information. I called SHARKFISH 37 and vectored him toward the location of STINGER 41G. In spite of the heavy ground fire, I directed the UH-1 into a pickup position and unfortunately, the trees were too high for him to land. He extended a rope to STINGER 41G who tied the rope to his harness and was evacuated to a safer clearing where he was picked up by a US Army Dustoff, medical support helicopter. At this time, I was notified that the NVA was beginning to move troops to the west toward the crash site and the location of the survivors. When the alert A-37s (Hawk 01 and 02) arrived, I immediately began to direct them against the advancing NVA to enable the safe rescue of STINGER 41G.

I then coordinated with SUNDOG 29 to act as his radio relay for the arrival of the SAR package of SANDY 05 flight and JOLLY GREEN 23 and 33. Upon arrival, the SAR package then successfully recovered the 6 remaining STINGER 41 crew members. SUNDOG 29 and I then remained on station in an attempt to determine if there were any more survivors well into darkness until fuel exhaustion forced both of us to return to Tan Son Nhut. Following our return to base, SUNDOG 29 and I were escorted to the 7th Field Hospital in Saigon for an emotional reunion with the 6 survivors who had been picked up by the JOLLY GREENs.

As I reflect on the events on 2 May 1972, I am reminded of the importance of our Air Force Command and Control responsibility to act on the advice of the aircrews who fly the day-to-day missions. I am still surprised that the AC-119K's were fragged to fly daylight missions over the AAA environment above An Loc. As FACS, we were intimately familiar with the environment and used every asset at our disposal to support the ground commanders. We had assets available to use for Troops in Contact situations where the precise use of airpower was required. We recommended against repeated daylight exposure for the STINGER crews. It was inappropriate to expose a highly vulnerable combat asset such as the AC-119K to the daytime environment over An Loc. Yet these brave crews performed their tasks in an extraordinary manner. I fully support any further recognition that might be bestowed on these great American crew members. They truly performed above and beyond the call of duty on that day over the town of An Loc.

If you have any questions about this summary. Please call me at the phone number below. These men represent the finest of the Air Force combat experience.

Respectfully Submitted,



Thomas C. Waskow, Lt Gen USAF, (Retired)

9517 Northdowns Lane, Huntersville, NC,

28078

503.710.4689



2021
E. London
ex. 03.05