Lt HATCH

CREW REPORT ON THE COMBAT LOSS OF C-130 TASK FORCE ALPHA 302 MISSION

We arrived in the area just before 1000 local, 25 June 1968. There was a low, thin undercast at 500 feet, so we penetrated a hole about eight miles south, in the vicinity of the abandoned Prek Lok field. We were forced to remain at 300' under the overcast, following a road up to Katum. We made a low pass, spotted some army trucks, and landed on runway 34 at 1005. We were in good radio contact with "Allen Alpha," a ground-based forward air controller whom ALCC had told us to contact, but who knew nothing of the status of the airfield. There was absolutely no radio contact with Katum the entire day. We advised ALCC of the field condition, weather, altimeter setting, and that it was possible to get into the field.

While loading, we were told by ground troops to expect a mortar attack, since hostile troops were in the area, and invariably fire whenever fixed wing aircraft land. They had taken mortar rounds every day for the last week.

We took off at 1020 on runway 16, the recommended procedure with calm winds and we flew to Tay Ninh. The fact that we had been into both Tay Ninh and Katum later proved invaluable.

The 303 mission landed at Katum later, and had a blown tire. Mission 304 was circling overhead a while after, and took one 50 caliber round through the cargo compartment.

ALCC diverted us into Tan Son Nhut to pick up tires, a jack and maintenance team to take to Katum for Hommy 303. At Tan Son Nhut, we were briefed by 304 on firing at Katum and saw his damage. He mentioned he had

taken his hit a couple of miles north of the field and was never able to land. ALCC once again told us to contact "Allen Alpha" approaching Katum and said that fighter escort would meet us and could be contacted on Allen's frequency.

We took off from Tan Son Nhut at 1245 with a jack, tires, and two maintenance men. Twenty-five miles south of Katum, we called Allen Alpha and asked about our fighter support. He had just learned that we were to be supported by fighters. Since the fighters had not been scrambled, we told him we would land immediately, to get Hammy 303 out as soon as possible. He told us to advise him if we took fire, and he would try to get fighter support. He seemed unable to scramble any fighters immediately. As a matter of fact, Hammy 303 took two or three mortar rounds just before he took off.

A maximum effort landing was made on runway 34 with a straight-in, steep approach at 1315, and no hits were taken. The maintenance team, tires and jack were unloaded; a 155 millimeter howitzer and two thousand pounds of flares were unloaded. The howitzer was loaded in H compartment and the flares in front of it, which was the only possibility for center of gravity limitations. A pallet of barrier nets was also loaded on the ramp.

Ground time at Katum was fifty minutes, and just before takeoff, it started to rain. A maximum effort takeoff was made from runway 16 at 1405. Climb out was on the 165 degree radial with 50% flaps, gear up, at 130 knots. We used the same area as our approach, since we had taken no hits going into Katum.

Three miles out at 3000 feet, we felt an impact and the Aircraft Commander

said he thought we had been hit. The Loadmaster called, "Sir, there's a fire back here!" He first thought the fire was aft of the left gear because of the reflection of the flames. Going for a fire extinguisher, he saw that the fire was on the left wing, and told the rest of the crew.

Simultaneously, the Aircraft Commander noticed that number one engine and the left wing were on fire. He called, "Number one is on fire and I am feathering it!" He pulled number one fire emergency control handle, and moved the condition lever to feather. He accomplished these actions himself because both controls were close to him and time was vital. The Aircraft Commander had the Co-pilot discharge the fire extinguisher agent, and then the second bottle. This limited the engine fire somewhat, but had no effect on the Wing fire.

The Aircraft Commander turned back toward Katum, but decided against landing there because the only course took us over the area where we were hit, and we did not want to go into a short field under those conditions. As it turned out, it was the correct decision. The Aircraft Commander asked the Navigator for a heading to the nearest field. The Navigator suggested Tay Ninh and a heading of 200 degrees. Tay Ninh has a 3900' runway vs 2900' at Katum, which was also a consideration. The Aircraft Commander turned and the Co-pilot switched to guard channel and declared an emergency, while the Navigator called on all other frequencies, and the Flight Engineer set the IFF on emergency. The Engineer later stated that he saw No. 1 fire light come on at this time.

The Aircraft Commander slipped the aircraft away from the fire, but this was ineffective. However, the fire did not seem to be moving toward the fuselage. Hommy 303 later reported a fifteen second burst of automatic weapons fire was observed when we were hit, and said that the aircraft appeared to be engulfed in flames. The sighting of two parachutes from our aircraft was also reported by Hommy 303, which was still on the ground at Katum. We think the left outboard 20-man life raft left the aircraft at this point; and the sighting of this and airplane parts burning away caused the erroneous report.

The Co-pilot, using a visual fix on Tay Ninh, reported our position as twenty miles north of the field. Several aircraft answered the call, and Dustoff 159, who was in the area, followed us from fifteen miles out and was ready to give aid in the event of a forced landing before Tay Ninh.

While the Co-pilot broadcast the Mayday, the Aircraft Commander raised the flap handles, but apparently there was no power to the guage, and the flap position indicator remained off scale. The flaps did not retract, but this was unknown until after the landing.

The Aircraft Commander told the Flight Engineer to dump fuel from the left wing. The operation was severely hampered by the double thickness of safety wire on the switch guard. The Co-pilot managed to break the number two main tank safety wire with his hand and open the dump switch. Then the Flight Engineer broke the wire on number one and auxiliary tanks with a screwdriver. We later felt that dumping the left wing's fuel allowed us to

remain airborne an additional 10 - 15 seconds, because the heavier right wing counteracted the rolling tendency to the left during the later portion of the flight.

The Aircraft Commander then gave the command to prepare for bailout, and the loadmaster brought parachutes forward for the crew, and put one on. The Aircraft Commander had the Co-pilot hold full right rudder, which was continued until short final.

The Aircraft Commander considered landing in a nearby rice paddy whose longitudinal axis was within ten degrees of our course (about 11 miles northeast of Tay Ninh), and actually turned the aircraft toward it, but decided to continue toward Tay Ninh, since the aircraft was still controllable, and he saw the runway at Tay Ninh and thought we had a chance to make it.

Utility hydraulic pressure was lost almost immediately after we were hit. However, it took us a couple of minutes to realize this. We had auxilary and booster hydraulic pressure at all times. The Engineer and Loadmaster were sent to the rear to crank the gear down manually. They were told to attempt to jettison the black powder if they had time, but they did not get the opportunity. (The conditions in the cargo compartment were worsening quickly, and their courage was extraordinary.)

Fortunately, the left gear free fell to the extended position, indicating safe in the cockpit. The Engineer told us that the right gear was in transit and he started cranking it down.

About this time, the Aircraft Commander noticed that the left wing was bending at a point some three feet outboard of the number one engine. The

Aircraft Commander had been feeding in right aileron to counteract a tendency of the airplane to roll left. By the time we were established on a four mile final, full right aileron was required to keep the aircraft level. If any of the left aileron was left on the wing, it was apparently useless. The wing fire was increasing rapidly in intensity as the fire burned into No 1 fuel tank. The Co-pilot told Tay Minh to clear the runway, and we were advised that crash equipment was standing by.

The Aircraft Commander told the Flight Engineer and the Loadmaster to come to the flight deck to strap in. The Engineer said he did not have the right gear fully extended. They were ordered to the flight deck anyway and told to prepare for a crash landing. The Aircraft Commander noticed that the nose gear was still retracted, and told the Engineer to hit the nose gear emergency extension handle. The command was not heard, because the engineer was off headset returning to the flight deck. Perhaps this was fortunate, for the extra drag of the nose section helped slow us, and the roughness of the runway shoulder could have forced the gear into the flight deck.

The Engineer pulled the flight deck escape hatch on the way to his seat, and we contemplated jettisoning the crew entrance door, but decided against it because of the possibility of hitting the only working propeller on the left side. The Navigator and the Loadmaster cleared the flight deck of briefcases and parachutes. The Aircraft Commander gave the order to lock shoulder harnesses.

Throughout the flight, the Aircraft Commander maintained 180 knots, bleeding down toward a 130-knot threshold speed at four miles. Touchdown was at approximately 120 knots, on the runway center line, 150 feet down the runway. The left main gear contacted first, and the Pilot attempted to hold the right wing up as long as possible. The right side of the fuselage and then the nose section struck the runway. The Co-pilot selected emergency brakes and the Pilot brought the engines to ground idle and reversed engines two and three, with little result. With reducing airspeed, the aileron became ineffective, and the right wing began dragging. Left rudder and brakes were partially effective, but the aircraft yawed violently to the right and ran off the runway 2100 feet from the approach end. Several helicopter landing pads were struck, and the airplane came to rest about 3,000 feet down the runway. (Runway Length: 9900')

As it came to a halt, the airplane exploded, and was temporarily engulfed in flames, which quickly retarded to the wing area, but both wings continued to burn violently. The Engineer called for T-Handles and Numbers 2, 3 and 4 fire handles were pulled by the Co-pilot.

The Loadmaster exited first through the flight deck overhead escape hatch, followed by the Navigator and Flight Engineer. The pilots both escaped through their windows. Everyone assembled on the ground and ran to a safe position. At this time, the crew noticed one of the life rafts was inflated and sitting on the left wing.

We were met by ambulances of the 25th Medical Battalion and examined at their dispensary, where we were treated for minor cuts and bruises.