

***On 1 October 1971, I was flying a MACVSOG VR mission in Cambodia when I heard an emergency locator beacon. I scanned the sky to the south of the border and saw a huge cloud of black smoke on the horizon. I flew to the crash site and coordinated with Crown that a Rustic FAC had already arrived on scene and was coordinating the rescue.***

BACKGROUND:

Falcon 33B. the Rustic FAC was near bingo fuel and Crown passed the SAR coordination off to me. Looking at the crash site I could very easily see that the crash was from an F-4 but I had no more beeper or voice contact with any other survivors. I called back to our Special Forces base at Quan Loi and requested a SF team be inserted to determine if there were any other survivors of the crash. A U.S. three-man SF team was inserted at the crash site by a Vietnamese CH-34 Kingbee helicopter. After about 40 minutes on the ground the team notified me that they had found the remains of the pilot, Falcon 33A still in the front cockpit and they would return the remains to Quan Loi, about 15 miles from the crash site. I then proceeded to Quan Loi and tried to convince the Vietnamese CH-34 crew to fly the remains to the morgue in Saigon. The helicopter crew said the weather was too bad to fly the remains to Saigon. Quan Loi was a very remote FOL with no suitable facility to hold the body until the weather was better. No way would I allow the body to stay at Quan Loi overnight.

Being the impetuous Lt that I was I said I would fly the body to Saigon. What was the worst the Air Force could do to me?... send me to SEA as a FAC? So, the crew chief loaded the body (it was in a body bag) onto the back seat of my O-2 and I took off into a very nasty line of thunderstorms. Being an accomplished VFR FAC I had my hands full on the 40-minute flight to Saigon and the morgue. It was raining so hard that the water was coming in through the top of the windscreen soaking all the instruments and the aircraft got hit by lightning on the right-wing tip. The smell of the burned flesh of the casualty was overwhelming. I had to use all the very limited IFR flying skills I had acquired in my previous 9 months flying in SEA. After the most terrifying flight in my SEA tour, I safely landed at Saigon and requested the morgue meet my aircraft on the ramp and transport the body for processing. I was ready for a well-deserved beer. The morgue folks said not so fast Lt. you have to go the morgue and sign for the body.

After about a 60-minute wait, the morgue folks came to me and said I was free to go as they had ID'd the casualty. Out of curiosity I asked for the name of the pilot. The sergeant reviewed some paperwork and said, "Captain James V. Newendorp". The sergeant saw the look on my face and asked if I was OK... The answer was no...Captain Newendorp had been my T-37 IP at Reese AFB just 2 years prior. Jim Newendorp even recommend that I take a FAC assignment if no fighters were available in my class assignment block of aircraft. I did not even know he was flying the RF-4 in Vietnam. Instead of my well-deserved beer I walked straight to the base chapel at Tan San Nhut and prayed for the family of Jim Newendorp as I knew he had a wife and two small children at Reese.

As a side line to this event, I finally met with the Newendorp family, son and daughter, brothers and sisters in Golden Colorado in 2008, just before the 2008 Colorado Springs FAC Reunion and shared all the details of Jim's "rescue". I guess the bottom line is that occasionally you just have to do the right thing and be prepared to live with the outcome.