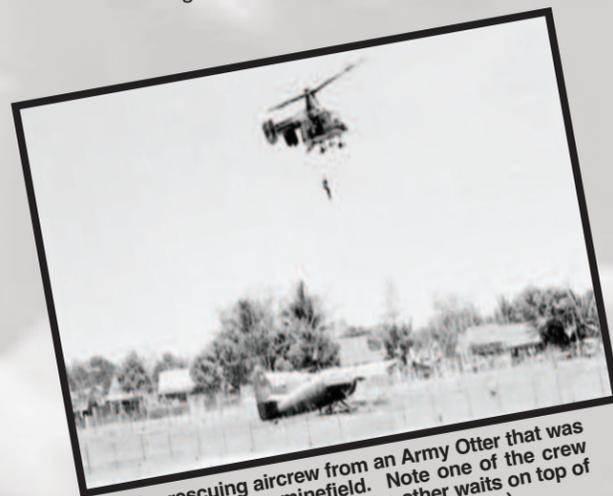


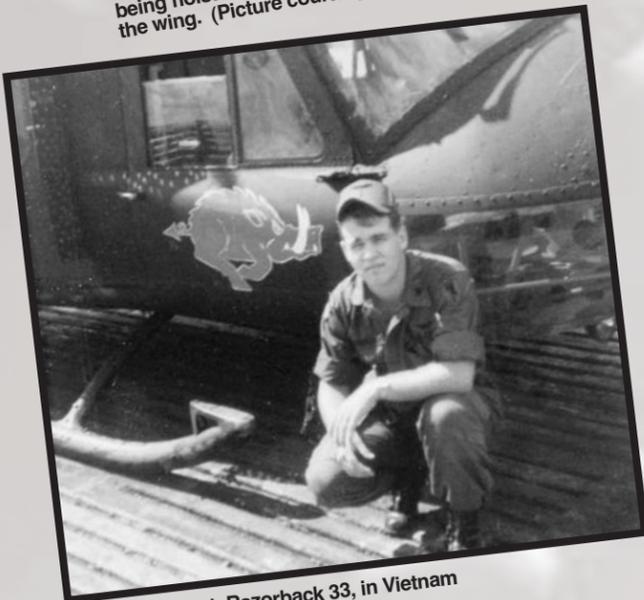
"Cementing A Friendship-The Hard Way"

By Steve Bookout

I recently had the good fortune to meet Jason Stone at a recent Razorback Reunion through one of our old crewchiefs, Bill Stribling. These two had been friends since the mid-1960s. There's an exciting story here, but first a little back ground. Jason attended the reunion to record interviews with some of our former crew members in order to flesh out a made for TV documentary he was assembling about the Razorback guns. After all the lies and war stories had been filmed, I asked Bill how he got acquainted with this guy in the wild luau shirt. It turned out that Mr. Stone was an enlisted member of an Air Force air rescue unit, callsign "Pedro", flying HH-43B Kaman "Huskies". Pedro's mission was to rescue downed US and VNAF aircrew during the Vietnam War. It also turns out that both the Pedro's and Razorbacks flew out of Tan Son Nhut. I automatically assumed their friendship sprang up from working at the air base with one another, but you know the old adage about the word 'as-



Pedro rescuing aircrew from an Army Otter that was forced down in a minefield. Note one of the crew being hoisted aboard while the other waits on top of the wing. (Picture courtesy of Jason Stone)



Steve Bookout, Razorback 33, in Vietnam

sume', eh? And in this case, "boy was I wrong!" The narrative is in Bill and Jason's own words, so set back and enjoy. Cheers, Steve Bookout - Razorback 33

So, as Paul Harvey would say if he could: Now for the rest of the story.

Bill Stribling's account of that day's action: A VNAF C-47 had gone down in the Saigon area, and there were casualties that had to get medical attention ASAP. Jason and another Air Force Husky crewman were left behind in order to load all of the VNAF casualties on board. After their Medivac aircraft left, VC from a nearby village approached the downed aircraft, and a firefight ensued. Things didn't look too good for Jason and friend, when suddenly a Razorback light fireteam came thumping along, sized up the situation, rolled in, and killed most of the VC. Jason found out it was MAJ Chad Payne, the Razorback platoon leader that got him out of the jam and arranged to meet him. They became friends and Jason started hanging around the Razorback flight lines with both our Starcom and "30 minute" teams. Jason then started flying missions with us, strictly as an observer of course, and while there he took lots of combat photos. I made friends with Jason that way, but we got pretty tight after being on my ship the day we were shot down supporting a downed 25th Div bird.

We were flying recon when we heard the Mayday call on Guard from a Centaur gunship that had been shot down in a dry rice paddy. The crew was still under fire and the NVA were closing in. We got there within five minutes and saw the gunship on its side, in a series of dry rice paddy's with bamboo growing up on all of the dike lines in an about ten-acre area with a village nearby. Our bird was the wing ship in the team and when we rolled in on our first pass, I saw guys in uniform everywhere on the ground. They were in both the thick bamboo and out in the open. I clearly remember one big guy running with a RPD machine gun. The dust, smoke, and noise were incredible, and seemed to get worse with each pass. We were getting hit pretty regular on every pass, some of which came from .51 cal machine guns. On the fourth pass, we smelled fuel, and the fuel warning light lit up. WO Davis, our right seat pilot, rolled to our right, trying to fly over a wide swath of jungle but the girl just couldn't stay in the air - we made a hard landing about 100 meters beyond in a large dry paddy.

Razorback 6 started an orbit around us while we got the pilots out. Mike Klinker, the other crew chief, Jason, and I set up a perimeter behind a dike facing the direction of the fight. We immediately started receiving heavy automatic weapons fire from the tree line and returned fire. Overhead, 6 could see 30 or so bad guys in the edge of the jungle and called two F-100's to our position pretty quick. They dropped napalm, and 250 pounders on the woods, then made 20 MM cannon runs.

While all this was going on, a 25th Div Cav unit was in the area, and a young M-60 tank commander made the decision to get the 25th Div gunship aircrew out by himself. He punched through the bamboo and dikes to the aircraft's position firing his .50 cal machinegun. The crew got on board under heavy fire and as the tank was attempting to back out to safety, the young tank commander was struck in the head and killed by an AK 47 round. The gunship's crewchief got in the cupola and fired the .50 cal at the enemy as the tank made its escape.

Meanwhile, our fire team lead, Major Payne, had burned his fuel

load down enough to try and lift Jason and our crew out. He landed the ship and we all piled on board at a dead run and took off under extremely heavy fire. Everybody that could get a gun barrel out the left door started firing at the woodline. We were so overloaded that Razorback 6 had to bounce his ship three or four times in order to get enough translational lift to clear the dike lines. Arriving back at Hotel Three, we were given another ship to fly missions that night, they sling loaded our ship back by Chinook, and Jason took a picture of me pointing to a .51 cal bullet hole. After that experience, Jason and I were pretty close.

Jason Stone adds:

Adding to Bill's narrative, what I remember is when the Razorbacks first received the Mayday call, one ship had been shot down and another was covering it. By the time we arrived, the second ship had also gotten shot down, so we flew top cover for them until we were shot down ourselves! Things are a blur nowadays, but I remember opening the pilot's door after the crash to help get him out because his seat's armor plate was blocking his exit. We then set up a perimeter and I was distracted by several upset bees flying around my head. I said something to Bill and he informed me that it wasn't bees but enemy bullets coming at us! They were so close to my ears that I could hear them buzzing as they went by.

We started firing into the tree line until some F-100's from Bien Hoa came in and raked the area with napalm and 20 mm cannon fire. They made an eerie sound like a banshee, but gave us a little relief. When MAJ Chad Payne, Razorback 6, flew in to pick us up, I stayed at the rice paddy dike shooting until Mr. Early Watkins came over and told me to get my a** in the chopper. While running for the helicopter, I lost my balance and my M-16 dug into the ground. Getting on board, there was s**t flying everywhere at us. I was almost ready to fire the 16 when I stopped, put the safety on and checked the barrel. Sure enough, the barrel was clogged with dirt from when I had lost my balance. I immediately broke the rifle down so that it wouldn't be grabbed by mistake. If I had pulled that trigger, none of us would have probably been around to tell the tale. It seems also that there was yet another helicopter shot down that day making it a total of 4 birds down in the middle of an NVA Battalion in that one action.



Jason Stone in Vietnam, dressed for his Air Force Search & Rescue mission. (Picture courtesy of Jason Stone)



Bill Stribling, Crewchief for the Razorbacks in Vietnam



Pedro's and Razorback's share ramp space at Tan Son Nhut. (Picture courtesy of Jason Stone)

