

Member Spotlight: Mark Weaver, A Timely Story

Well, the New Year is behind us now, but it's always a good time to take stock of yourself and where you want to be in life. Last year brought changes to my life which have made me reflect on the past. I've picked a sea story with a moral to tell.

My Navy career was very good, fitting the adventurous mottos the Navy used to get me to enlist. I was a helicopter crewman my entire service time and towards the end of my career we focused a lot on combat search and rescue. We flew a lot in the East County, practicing a mission first in the daylight, and then at night with our night vision equipment. This training was to prepare us in case we ever had to use these skills in a hostile environment.

As a rehearsal to our carrier deployment aboard USS Carl Vinson, our entire airwing deployed to Fallon, Nevada for advanced tactical training. Most of our flights simulated rescue missions involving both friendly and aggressor aircraft.

These complex missions utilized our helicopters to actually pick up pilots at night.

My role in these missions as crew chief basically had to do with timing. Other aircraft located our simulated survivor and verified his or her identity while my helicopter and crew stood off in a safe location. Once the pilot's position was known, we plotted out a course to retrieve the pilot and the time it would take to get there.

In the Nevada exercises, we were constantly hounded by aggressor air and ground forces to simulate threats we might find in Iraq. Our helicopter had two pilots and three crewman all outfitted with night vision gear with two side mounted machine guns.

We were going to locate an individual at night while trying to stay as low as possible to the ground. Seldom did we fly above two hundred feet and we had to be especially aware of height threats like power lines and towers.

As I mentioned before, my job was timing the checkpoints to the pick-up. We usually had several routes with a multitude of checkpoints to approach the final pick-up. Flying at such a low level took all of the skills of both pilots so, as we approached each checkpoint, I would either call push, slow, or on-time.

When we were one minute out, the rescap aircraft would direct the survivor to light his signaling device. Our pilots made the decision to land, but my crewman cleared the ground to be landed on. We were very security conscience so we insured the survivor's identity before we brought him aboard.



Photo from Mark Weaver who is at the beginning of the front row, far left.

After the mission was over, the different assets involved had a debriefing and discussed coordination and lessons learned. This was very important because as complex as this sounds it was simple compared to real life combat.

While deployed, we did get to Camp Doha, Kuwait and together with Air Force units stood rescap duties for many weeks while our Air Force

bombed Iraq prior to the ground war. Several of our missions flew right up to the border; however, we never had to use our training in a real life combat rescue.

These feats taught me how much is accomplished by a good team. I learned the value of practice and training, which there is no substitute. But mostly I learned to know, respect, and trust other people to which I'm sure I owe my life.

Since then, I've hired on with the trolley and tried to apply my military lessons in civilian life. I still have good memories of my service time and realize that moments like I've described in this story might just be some of the most meaningful and lucky accomplishments in my life. This year my right gunner from Kuwait passed away while on a training mission, so maybe that's another reason to tell this story.